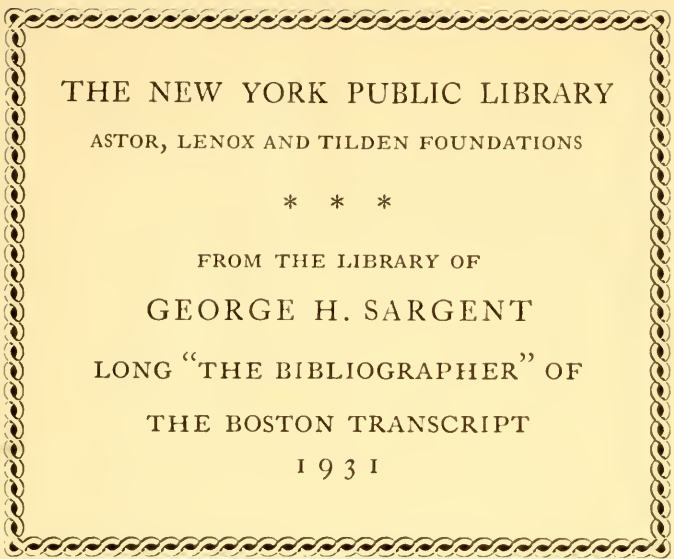


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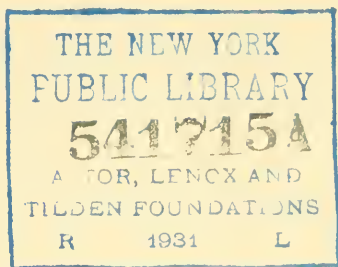
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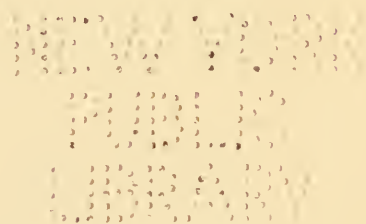


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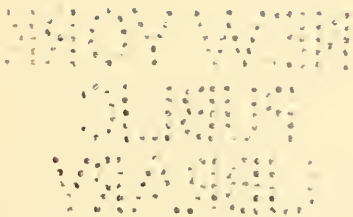
# WALT WHITMAN IN MICKLE STREET

ELIZABETH LEAVITT KELLER



NEW YORK  
MITCHELL KENNERLEY  
MCMXXI

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

**E**LIZABETH LEAVITT KELLER was born at Buffalo, N. Y., on November 3, 1839. Both her parents were descended from the first settlers of this country, and each in turn came to Buffalo in its early days, her mother, Sarah Ellis, by private conveyance in 1825, and her father, James S. Leavitt, by way of the newly opened Erie Canal in 1834.

Elizabeth was the second daughter. In the spring of 1841 she was taken to Niagara Falls, and all her childhood recollections are clustered around that place. Returning to Buffalo in 1846, her father opened a bookbindery, and later added a printing office and stationery store.

At nineteen years of age Elizabeth Leavitt was married to William Wallace Keller, of Little Falls, N. Y. Seven years later she became a widow.

Her natural instinct for nursing was developed during the Civil War and the years that followed, but the time and opportunity

Leavitt was 15 May 1931

for professional training did not come until 1876, when, her two children being provided for, she was free to apply for admission to the school for nurses connected with the Women's Hospital in Philadelphia — one of the three small training schools then existing in the United States.

Before her course was finished her younger sister died. Mrs. Keller left the hospital to take care of the five motherless children, and it was not until ten years later that she was free to resume her training. When she graduated she was a grandmother — the only one, it need scarcely be said, in the class.

While nursing her patient, Walt Whitman, during his last illness, she learnt much about his personality and home life, and much also about his unselfish friend and house-keeper, Mrs. Davis. The desire to tell the truth about the whole case — so often misunderstood or distorted — grew stronger with the passing years, and finally Mrs. Keller entered an old ladies' home in her own city, where she would have leisure to carry out her design. Here the book was commenced and completed. "After numerous struggles and disappointments," she writes, "my second great desire — to set Mrs.



Davis in her true light — has been fulfilled — this time by a great-grandmother!"

It is not often that a great-grandmother, after a long life of service to others, sees her first book published on her eighty-second birthday.

Mrs. Keller uses her pen as if she were twenty or thirty years younger. Her letters are simple but cheery, her outlook on life contented but in no way obscured. Not deliberately, but through a natural gift, she conveys vivid impressions of the world as it now appears to her, just as she conveys so unpretentiously but unforgettably in her book the whole atmosphere of Walt Whitman's world, when it had been narrowed to the little frame house in Mickle Street, and finally to a bed of suffering in one room of that little house.

Whatever else her book may be, it is an extraordinary instance of revelation through simplicity; the picture stands out with all its details, not as a work of conscious art, but assuredly as a work that the artist, the student of life and of human nature, will be glad to have.

CHARLES VALE



## PREFACE

**H**AD it ever occurred to me that the time might come when I should feel impelled to write something in regard to my late patient, Walt Whitman, I should have taken care to be better prepared in anticipation; would have kept a personal account, jotted down notes for my own use, observed his visitors more closely, preserved all my correspondence with Dr. Bucke, and recorded items of more or less interest that fade from memory as the years go by. Still, I have my diary, fortunately, and can be true to dates.

After I had been interviewed a number of times, and had answered various questions to the best of my knowledge and belief, I was surprised to see several high-flown articles published, all based on the meagre information I had furnished, and all imperfect and unsatisfactory.

Interviewers seemed to look for something beyond me; to wait expectantly in the hope that I could recall some unusual thing

in Mr. Whitman's eccentricities that I alone had observed; words that I alone had heard him speak; opinions and beliefs I alone had heard him express; anything remarkable, not before given to the public. They wanted the sensational and exclusive, if possible. I suppose that was natural.

But it set me thinking that if my knowledge was of any value or interest to others, why not write a truthful story myself, instead of having my words enlarged upon, changed and perverted? Simple facts are surely better than hasty exaggerations.

I have done what I could. One gentleman (*Mr. James M. Johnston, of Buffalo*), who has read the manuscript, and for whose opinion I have the greatest regard, remarked as he returned it: "It appears to me that your main view in writing this was to exonerate Mrs. Davis."

He had discovered a fact I then recognized to be the truth.

My greatest fear is that I may have handled the whole truth too freely—without gloves.

E. L. K.

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WALT WHITMAN  
IN MICKLE STREET



*I write this book  
in loving memory of  
three of the most kind-hearted,  
unselfish and capable people I ever knew  
I Dedicate It  
to  
ALEX. McALISTER, M.D.*



## HALCYON DAYS

Not from successful love alone,  
Nor wealth, nor honored middle-age,  
Nor victories of politics or war;  
But as life wanes, and all the turbulent pas-  
sions calm,  
As gorgeous, vapory, silent hues cover the  
evening sky,  
As softness, fulness, rest, suffuse the frame  
like fresher, balmier air,  
As the days take on a mellower light,  
And the apple at last hangs really finish'd  
and indolent-ripe on the tree,  
Then for the teeming quietest, happiest days  
of all,  
The brooding and blissful halcyon days!

WALT WHITMAN





# WALT WHITMAN IN MICKLE STREET

## I

MARY OAKES DAVIS

*"She hath wrought a good work on me . . . This also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."*—ST. MARK XIV: 6, 9.

*"Whitman with the pen was one man—Whitman in private life was another man."*—THOMAS DONALDSON.

SOMEONE has said: "A veil of silence, even mystery, seems to have shut out from view the later home life of Walt Whitman."

There is no reason for this, but if it be really so, the veil cannot be lifted without revealing in a true light the good woman — Mary Oakes Davis — so closely connected with the poet's later years, and of whom he often spoke as "my housekeeper, nurse and friend."

Mrs. Davis's life from the cradle to the grave was one of self-sacrifice and devotion

to others. Her first clear recollection was of a blind old woman to whom her parents had given a home. In speaking of this she said: "I never had a childhood, nor did I realize that I had the right to play like other children, for at six years of age 'Blind Auntie' was my especial charge. On waking in the morning my first thought was of her, and then I felt I must not lie in bed another minute. I arose quickly, made my own toilet and hastened to her." She continued with a detailed account of the attention daily given to "Auntie," how she put on her stockings and shoes, and handed her each article of clothing as it was needed; how she brought fresh water for her ablutions, combed her hair and made her presentable for the table; how at all meals she sat by her side to wait upon her, and how, after helping her mother with the dishes, she walked up and down the sidewalk until schooltime to give "Auntie" her exercise, the walks being repeated when school was over.

It seems strange that parents could permit such sacrifice for an outsider, however helpless, unmindful of their injustice toward the little daughter who so willingly and unconsciously yielded up her young life. No wonder this lesson of utter devotion to an-

other, so early implanted in the tender heart of the child, should in after years become part and parcel of the woman.

When Mary was twelve years of age "Blind Auntie" died. Then came two more years of schooling, after which the girl voluntarily assumed another burden—the care of a melancholy, selfish invalid, a distant relative living in the country, of whom she had heard much from time to time. With her she stayed for six years, being in turn nurse, companion, housekeeper or general servant, as need required.

Poor child, she failed in brightening the invalid's life—which was her only hope in going there. All her efforts were unappreciated and misunderstood, and it was a hard task to follow out what she conceived to be her duty. During the first four years her sole remuneration was a small sum of money on rare occasions, or a few articles of clothing; during the last two, a modest monthly salary. The entire period was one of unremitting care and self-abnegation, and at the age of twenty, utterly disheartened, she summoned up resolution to leave.

She had long contemplated paying a visit to an old schoolmate and dear friend, Mrs. Fritzinger, the wife of a sea-captain, whose

home was in Camden, New Jersey, and to this city she now went. Arriving, to her great sorrow she found her friend in a serious physical condition, and remained to nurse her through a protracted illness, which ended fatally. On her deathbed Mrs. Fritzinger confided her two young sons to Mary's care, and from this time on they called her mother.

Captain Fritzinger soon became blind and had to give up the sea. He still however retained marine interests in Philadelphia, to and from which city Mary led him daily. Then came a long illness. The Captain appointed Mary co-guardian to his two sons, and at his death divided his property equally between the three.

Captain Davis, a friend of the Fritzingers, had met Mary during Mrs. Fritzinger's lifetime. He was much attracted to her, proposed marriage and was accepted on condition that the wedding should not take place as long as her friends had need of her. But time slipped by; it may be Captain Davis thought their need of her would never end; so, meeting her in Philadelphia one morning, he insisted upon their going to a minister's and becoming man and wife. Mary, thus forcefully pressed, consented, but exacted the promise that he would not tell the Frit-

zingers until his return from the trip he was on the eve of taking.

In a few days he left Camden. His vessel was wrecked off the coast of Maine, and he was buried where he washed ashore.

His hasty marriage and unlooked-for death prevented him from making the intended provision for his wife, and as she shrank from any contest with his family, all that was left to her was his name and the cherished memory of her one brief love.

During Captain Fritzinger's nine years of blindness, and through all his long sickness, Mary's ingrained habit of devotion to one person made her somewhat forgetful of others; and dearly as she loved the boys who called her mother, their happiness was too often sacrificed to their father's infirmities. Strange—and yet not strange, perhaps—that one whose childhood had been an unbroken martyrdom, should now be not always conscious of the needs of a new generation.

The house in which they lived, in a little street running at right angles to Stevens Street, was closed at dusk. Then, when she had read the daily papers, Mary would extinguish the lights, feeling that to read to herself, or for the boys to play games, would be selfish, as the sick man was deprived of

such enjoyments. It didn't occur to her that these wide-awake youngsters had nothing of her own childhood spirit of resignation, or that the noise and laughter of other boys frolicking in the streets could have any attraction for them. They were sent early to bed, but time and again made their escape through the window, creeping along the shed, and so to the fence and the street.

Both boys had an innate love for the sea, and at the age of fourteen and sixteen respectively had become so restless and urgent for a change, that their father yielded to their wishes and procured berths for them aboard the same ship. In two years they returned to find him dead, and in a short time they embarked again in separate vessels and for longer voyages.

During their first absence, Captain Fritzing had invited another ex-captain—an old shipmate and intimate friend—to come to his house to board, and for mutual companionship. The new guest was in poor health and extremely crotchety, and immediately upon his host's demise he took possession of the bed left empty. Then ensued for Mrs. Davis two more years of fidelity and constant care, until the one old shipmate went the way of the other.



But even now the long-trying woman was not left without someone to minister to, for shortly before a young orphan girl had been entrusted to her. It was certainly her destiny to find full scope for the spirit of self-sacrifice so early implanted, and so persistently called upon. But it was almost inevitable for such a nature to be unconscious of the vein of irony in human affairs, of the element of the grotesque in the sublime. She went quietly on her accustomed way. It was her vocation to be victimized, and her daily business to be a blessing to others.

Such was the woman who entered so closely into Walt Whitman's life during the seven years spent in Mickle Street. She meant more to him than he was perhaps aware of; more, certainly, than he ever cared to admit. If she was incapable of realizing the fulness of his genius, he seemed unable to measure the fulness of hers. But he was glad to profit by it.

## II

### WALT WHITMAN'S HOME

*"And whether I come into my own to-day or in ten thousand or in ten million years,  
I can cheerfully take it now or with equal cheerfulness  
I can wait."*—WALT WHITMAN.

*"I only thought if I didn't go, who would?"*

—MARY O. DAVIS.

AFTER physical disability had incapacitated him for duty, Walt Whitman went to Camden, the New Jersey suburb of Philadelphia, and there the remaining years of his life were spent, at first in his brother's house in Stevens Street and later in a little frame cottage, No. 328 Mickle Street, "where he lived alone with a single attendant," as a magazine writer phrased it. This attendant was Mary Oakes Davis.

With but one exception (*Thomas Donaldson*, in "*Walt Whitman the Man*"), all writers who have touched upon Whitman's domestic life seem to have failed to mention the interval between his two Camden homes. Fortunately it was of short duration, but in it came the great turning point in his career.

Of his early habits something may be learned from his brother George, who says: "Walt was always a trying person to live with." (*"In Re Walt Whitman."*) Then he goes on to relate some of the poet's peculiarities, irregularities and eccentricities. "He had an idea that money was of no consequence . . . He would lie abed late, would write a few hours if he took the notion, perhaps would go off for the rest of the day. If we had dinner at one, like as not he would come at three; always late. Just as we were fixing things on the table he would get up and go around the block. He was always so.

"He would come to breakfast when he got ready. If he wished to go out, he would go, go where he was a mind to, and come back in his own time."

It cannot be denied that a person with these traits of character would be an uncomfortable inmate to have in any home, and with Mr. Whitman this disregard for the convenience of others grew more marked as he advanced in years and deteriorated in body. Notwithstanding this, when his good brother and his most excellent sister-in-law retired to their farm in Burlington, New Jersey, they urged him to accompany them.

Their kind offer of a home Mr. Whitman

thought best to decline, for although at this time he had but a restricted popularity as an author, he had some staunch friends in his own city, in New York, Philadelphia and abroad, and after twelve years' residence in one locality he thought it unwise to change.

No doubt he did not take into consideration the difficulties he would have to encounter alone, nor realize how unfitted he was to cope with them; but as usual he overruled all opposition and followed his own inclination.

Or he may have had a premonition of the popularity just at hand.

First he rented a room, taking his meals at odd times and in odd places. This he soon found to be a miserable mode of existence, for he was crippled financially as well as physically, and even to this late day, "his medium of circulating his views to the world was through very limited editions, which he himself usually paid for, or which failed to circulate at all." (*Thomas Donaldson.*)

The old man with his basket of literature upon his arm, plodding his way through the streets of Camden and Philadelphia, had long been a familiar sight, and now with slow sales and lack of former comforts it was doubly hard on him. But at this time his life had

settled down to one great desire, that of re-writing his book, *Leaves of Grass*, and living to see it put before the world in a full, improved and complete form.

He believed it was to be, and this was his principal object in remaining in a city where he had already suffered the delays and disappointments that make the heart sick and wear out the body. Yet dark as was the outlook, this hope buoyed him up, and after the struggles of half a century his courage had not forsaken him.

"In the period named, he was hungry, cold and neglected," says Donaldson; and again: "Whitman was extremely poor in Camden after his brother moved away, and up to about 1884. His change of luck began about then. He had previously, to use a sailor's phrase, 'been scudding under bare poles.' He had several runs of luck after 1884."

Walt Whitman and Mrs. Davis were not personally acquainted. To be sure, he had seen her innumerable times leading Captain Fritzinger past his brother's house, but he had never spoken to her. As for her, the poor old man had long been a secret pensioner upon her tender heart, drawing a full bounty of pity therefrom.

Their first interview took place on one

cold frosty morning, when in deepest dejection he came a suppliant to her door. Surprised as she was to find him there, she warmly invited him in, and a good breakfast soon followed the kind reception.

With his writings she was totally unacquainted, and she naturally shared the universal opinion of her neighbors, that he was "a little off." Nevertheless, when from the grateful warmth and good cheer he grew loquacious, and dilated upon his work and aired his lofty hopes, she listened attentively, that he might not suspect that to her all this seemed but an empty dream and delusion.

She talked encouragingly, and on his rising to go cordially invited him to repeat his visit. He did so, and thenceforward this compassionate woman's homely kitchen became his one haven of rest. He knew that a hot meal and many thoughtful attentions always awaited him there; attentions such as lacing his shoes, washing and mending his clothing, and not infrequently superintending a refreshing foot-bath. "Being an invalid he felt his helplessness, so attentions were doubly dear to him." (*Thomas Donaldson.*)

As the fall advanced and the weather grew severe, his bachelor quarters became more



and more unsuitable, and he was indeed fortunate in the friendship he had so auspiciously formed. He developed into a daily visitor, and each morning might have been seen scuffling along in his unclasped antiquated arctics, cane in hand, and his long white hair and beard blowing in the wind.

Mrs. Davis said that the very sight of those ungainly old arctics always brought tears to her eyes.

During this winter (1884-5), through the generosity of a Philadelphian (Mr. George W. Childs), and from the sale of his book, Mr. Whitman was in a way to arrange for a payment upon a small house. He was not the man to ask advice, and the selection he made was not a wise one. "It was a coop at best," as Thomas Donaldson says, and a much more comfortable home in a far more suitable location could have been secured for less than the price he had agreed to pay. However, it promised him a regular abiding place.

The house being occupied when he became the owner, he made an arrangement with the tenants: they were to remain, and he would come there to live with them, his board to offset the rent. But the scheme did not work, and at the expiration of the first month he was left solitary and alone with his personal

household goods, consisting of a scantily furnished bedstead, a home-made table, a rickety chair and a large packing box. The table served as writing desk and the packing box as kitchen and dining table. "Upon it was a small coal oil stove, where he would cook a bite at the risk of his life." (*Thomas Donaldson*.)

His daily visits to Mrs. Davis were resumed. Her back door would slowly open and he would appear saying in a pathetic voice: "Pity the sorrows of a poor old man, whose trembling limbs have brought him to your door." He was always welcomed and former relations were renewed.

This continued for awhile, but light house-keeping being so great a tax upon him, and his house being so "forlorn, dirty and untenable," (*Thomas Donaldson*), Mrs. Davis went there with him in his perplexity.

How could the place be anything but cold when it was heated only by the occasional flame of an oil lamp? Worse still, the back door was held partly open by an accumulation of ice resulting from a ruptured water pipe.

Seeing how matters stood, Mrs. Davis, at that time a "strong, rosy-cheeked Jersey woman" (*Thomas Donaldson*), went to



work with a will, and the ice was rapidly dispersed by her vigorously wielded axe. With the door closed things soon assumed a more cheerful aspect, and at her suggestion Mr. Whitman purchased a small second-hand cooking stove, which, unassisted, she set up and got into running order. She carpeted his sleeping room, gave him a mattress and bedding, and in many other ways helped to make "the coop," as Whitman himself called it, more habitable and homelike. Then, unmindful of the distance—several blocks—she came each evening to attend to the fire, cook the food, run the invalid's errands and wait upon him generally.

In speaking of this time she said: "When the poor old man was not in sight, he was so much upon my mind I could not pass one peaceful hour." Suffice it to say, Walt Whitman had become the next object of her solicitude.

He has been called a prophet. Was it prophetic when, some years before, he wrote: "Though poor now even to penury, I have not been deprived of any physical thing I need or wish for whatever, and I feel confident I shall not in the future"?

Some have considered him a cunning man; all agree that he was a remarkable judge of

character. Understanding this woman as he did,—as he must have done,—had he resolved to have her devote herself to him? This question can never be truthfully answered, but whether with premeditation or not, he certainly had gained a great influence over her.

Although comparatively comfortable in his new home now, he did not discontinue his accustomed morning visits, and as he persisted in his old delinquencies he completely upset the routine of Mrs. Davis's daily life and work.

Things ran on in this way until one morning late in February, while he was sipping his coffee, he told her he had a proposition to make. He said: "I have a house while you pay rent; you have furniture while my rooms are bare; I propose that you come and live with me, bringing your furniture for the use of both." A suggestion of this kind was so unlooked for that she refused to give it a moment's consideration. He said no more at the time, but a few days later again broached the subject. And this he continued to do daily until Mrs. Davis, who remained firm for awhile, at last began to waver.

The young orphan girl strongly opposed such a step, but Mr. Whitman's persistence

prevailed, for Mrs. Davis at last gave a reluctant consent. The advantage was all on the poet's side, as he must have seen, but recent events had raised his hopes and he made promises of adequate and more than adequate returns for all that had been done or might be done for him.

As his money was "only in sight," to use his own words, the expenses of moving were paid by Mrs. Davis; as he was disabled, the work and worry were hers as well; but finally all was accomplished, her goods were transferred to his house and put in their new places, and the seven years of their domestic life together commenced. In this way did the "good gray poet" retire with his "single attendant" to the little frame cottage, No. 328 Mickle Street, Camden, New Jersey.

### III

## THE MICKLE STREET HOUSE

*"The tide turned when he entered the Mickle Street house."*—THOMAS DONALDSON.

*"Whitman had great satisfaction in the managing skill of his housekeeper."*—SIDNEY MORSE.

ADDED to "managing skill," Mrs. Davis had patience, perseverance, determination, courage and health; furthermore—having accompanied the Fritzinger family upon a number of ocean trips, undertaken in the hope of benefiting Mrs. Fritzinger—she had shipboard experience which enabled her to make available every inch of space in a house smaller than the one she had left. It was an unpretentious brown frame structure, sadly out of repair, and decidedly the poorest tenement in the block. On the right was a brick house whose strong walls seemed to be holding it up, while on the left was an alley—scarcely more than a gutter—closed from the street by a wooden door.

This narrow passage, filled with ice and

snow in the winter, often damp and slippery even in warm weather, was unfit for general use; and as the house was not properly drained, the cellar through its one little window was often flooded from dripping eaves.

Three wooden steps without a banister led from the sidewalk to the front door, which had to be closed to allow those who entered to ascend the stairs. This narrow staircase, an equally narrow hall and two connecting rooms called "the parlors" comprised the first floor of the main building. Between the parlors were folding doors, and each room had an exit into the hall. There were two windows in the front parlor and a single one in the back. Between and under the front windows was an entrance to the cellar, with old-fashioned slanting doors.

The rear and smaller portion of the house was divided into but two apartments, the kitchen below and a sleeping room above. At the back of the kitchen was a small shed, and quite a large yard. Some people believed that this yard, with its pear tree and grape vine, had been the main attraction of the place for Mr. Whitman.

On ascending the staircase, a small landing and the back sleeping room were reached; then, turning about, came more

stairs, with a larger landing, part of which had been made into a clothespress. Apart from this landing and a little den, sometimes known as "the anteroom," the upper portion of the main building had only one room. But the two doors in it, and a deep rugged scar across the low ceiling, testified to its having formerly been divided by a partition. As one of the doors was permanently fastened, the only access was through the den, anteroom, or "adjoining apartment," as it was also occasionally called.

In the larger room was a fireplace with a mantel shelf above. There were two windows corresponding with the windows below, while the smaller room or den, reduced to one-half its proper width by some pine shelves and an outjutting chimney, had like the room below but one. The outlook from this window, into which the sun made but a few annual peeps, was the brick wall on one side, the back roof on the other, and a glimpse of the sky.

The situation of the house was anything but inviting, and the locality was one that few would choose to live in. It was near both depot and ferry, and as the tracks were but a block away, or scarcely that, being laid in what would have been the centre of



the next street, there was an uninterrupted racket day and night. The noise of the passenger and excursion trains—for the excursions to the coast went by way of Camden—was only a minor circumstance compared with that of the freight trains as they thundered by, or passed and re-passed in making up.

Close at hand was a church with a sharp-toned bell, and a "choir of most nerve-unsettling singers" (*Thomas Donaldson*); and as if this were not enough, there was at times a most disagreeable odor from a guano factory on the Philadelphia side of the Delaware.

Such was the house to which Mary Davis had now come, and where through the strange, busy days of the next seven years she was destined to be Walt Whitman's indispensable "housekeeper, nurse and friend"—or, from the outsider's point of view, his "single attendant."

The spring of 1885 was far advanced before things were fairly in running order, for from the first there had been no intermission in the poet's erratic mode of living, and Mrs. Davis had been obliged to devote much time to his personal wants. Somehow he

had a way of demanding attention which she found it impossible to resist.

Truly she had been hampered on all sides, this faithful Martha-Mary; so many things to be seen to, so many things to handle and rehandle and change about before an established place for them could be found; the strenuous cleaning, for the former tenants had left the place extremely dirty; and the pondering over repairs, and deciding which were absolutely essential and unpostponable, and which could be put off for a little while longer.

She first carpeted, furnished and settled the parlors, intending the back one as the sleeping room for her young charge, until her marriage in the fall, when it could be used as a spare room. But Mr. Whitman had different intentions, for he at once appropriated both rooms, and would not allow the doors separating them to be closed.

One of the front windows became his favorite sitting place, and here he wrote, read his papers and sat while entertaining his friends. He was delighted with these rooms, and in them he enjoyed himself to his heart's content: first in getting things into disorder at once, and then in keeping them so.

The back room, which became kitchen,



dining room and sitting room combined, was so compactly filled that many people remarked its close resemblance to the cabin of a ship, in the way of convenience as compared with space. It was lighted by one window, and over the ingrain carpet a strip of stair carpeting made a pathway from the hall to the outer door.

On the sitting room side were a lounge, sewing machine, two rocking chairs, a stand and some small pieces of furniture; on the other was a dining table against the wall, one leaf extended and always set, with the dining chairs pushed under it when not in use; the range—a veritable giant—standing in place of the dwarf it had ousted; a sink with cubby-hole below, crowded to overflowing with pots and kettles, and shelves above loaded with dishes while their enclosing doors were closely hung with kitchen utensils. As the lower shelf only could be reached by hand, a stool (a chair that had lost its back) was kept under a projection of the range.

The shed, where Mr. Whitman's stove was set up, was packed with household goods and chattels, classified and stored ready for momentary use, and around the walls were suspended the extra chairs.

A shelf in the inside cellarway off the hall was the only pantry, and the sides of the cellarway the only tin-cupboard; then for want of a place for the flour barrel, it was left standing opposite the cellar door in the hall. In this part of the house people went by feeling, not by sight, and strangers as a rule always collided with the barrel before entering the kitchen.

The little passage between the back part of the house and the wall of the one adjoining it—simply a pathway to the back entrance of the cellar—Mrs. Davis canopied with old sails and utilized as a laundry. Here she kept her washing bench, tubs and pails, and here she washed and ironed when the weather permitted. This furnished the view from the back parlor window.

The cellar and its hanging shelf had their share of plunder, and here the firewood was sawed and split.

As for pictures, there were more than enough for all the rooms, and between them wall pockets, paper racks and brackets abounded.

Her family of birds—a robin she had rescued from a cat, a pair of turtle doves and a canary—she attached to the kitchen ceiling. She made a little place in the shed

for her cat's bed, and found a shelter for a few hens in the small outhouse. Her dog, more aristocratic, slept on the lounge.

On a shelf over the dining table were a clock, some china vases, and a stuffed parakeet. No wonder that upon entering the house the first thing observed was the over-filled appearance of each small room.

Upon a bracket in the front parlor she placed a model of a ship that had been given to Captain Fritzinger by the maker. This pleased Mr. Whitman exceedingly, for he had often noticed and admired it. He said that the first time he had desired to write anything was when he saw a ship in full sail. He tried to describe it exactly and failed; had often since studied ships in the vain hope of getting the whole beautiful story into words, but had never been able to do so.

The mantels of both parlors Mrs. Davis heaped with shells and curiosities from distant parts of the world. Some of them were rare and valuable.

Such was the inside of the house after it had passed through Mary's transforming hands. There were many things in it that might have been better elsewhere, perhaps. But where? It was only a little house, and Mary had come to it from a larger one, with

all her possessions. She had nowhere else to put them now, without losing them. If Mr. Whitman had any sense of being overcrowded, it was his own fault. She had come at his urging—and he had taken the two large parlors on the first floor, and the large front chamber with the anteroom above, entirely for his own use, thus leaving for the two women the kitchen (which he shared with them in its aspect of dining room) and the only remaining room in the house—the little back chamber on the second floor. Into this, they condensed and squeezed their more personal belongings.

## IV

### THE NEW RÉGIME

*"I know an old story. It goes back to 1826, when a monument to Bellman, the Swedish poet, was unveiled in Stockholm. The King and Queen were there, and Bellman's old wife. And the King spoke of the dead poet, and praised him in a flight of purple phrases; but the old wife said, 'Oh yes, but if your Majesty only knew what a nuisance he was about the house . . .'* But frankly, wouldn't you like to know what kind of a nuisance the poet was at home?"—VANCE THOMPSON.

DISCOVERING so quickly that her new charge was decidedly a self-centered person, and seeing that waiting upon him promised to be her chief occupation, Mrs. Davis planned her work accordingly, and being an early riser was able to devote the untrammelled morning hours to preparations for the day.

Mr. Whitman usually arose at nine o'clock, but in this, as in all things, he consulted his own wishes alone. His breakfast hour was any time during the forenoon; and no doubt he did not understand how or why this could discommode his new housekeeper.

When the signal came—one that Mrs.

Davis soon learned, three or four loud peremptory raps upon the floor above—she dropped whatever she might be doing and hastened upstairs.

Since Mr. Whitman's first stroke of paralysis, nearly twenty years before, he had become so disabled that he required much assistance while dressing, and for this he was not at all diffident in asking. Besides, he was "very curiously deliberate."

There being no water on the second floor, Mrs. Davis carried up and down all that he needed for his baths,—and he used water freely. Then when fully dressed he consulted his own feelings in regard to coming downstairs.

In his mother's house in Long Island, and in his brother's in Camden, Walt had seldom taken his meals with the family. While living in Brooklyn, New Orleans and Washington, his meal times were of no importance to anyone except himself, and he could not see why this rule should not apply to his own house, or any house where he might be staying. To him regular meals were a bondage he could not endure.

Going up and down stairs was a difficult task, and after coming to the Mickle Street house he seldom did so unaided, so the old



signal was repeated when he was ready to descend, and again Mrs. Davis hastened to him.

As he never would tell what he wanted until he was seated at the table, she always kept a supply of special things on hand; nothing elaborate,—maybe steak, chops, oysters or eggs. He never found fault with his food, and although he did not often commend it he must have been fully appreciative, for all through his letters and conversations, as given in the various books about him, are allusions to Mary's good cooking.

Occasionally, to suit her own convenience, she would have his breakfast prepared; but if she mentioned this fact while helping him to dress he would invariably say, "Ah! I will not eat anything for awhile." When the dishes had been set aside to be kept warm, and Mary was again busily engaged,—the wash perhaps partly hung on the line, or her deft hands in the dough,—the peremptory signal would come, and on being helped down and seated at the table he would coolly demand something entirely different from what she had provided.

He commenced housekeeping by inviting company—lord or beggar—to dine with him, and would keep these guests at the table for

hours; even "when he was eating off a dry goods box for a table, and drinking milk warmed over a coal oil lamp, and a few crackers with it, he would ask you to dine, with the dignity of a prince, and never apologize or mention the food." (*Thomas Donaldson.*)

A biographer (*Horace Traubel*) says, "He was very simple in his tastes, taking only two meals in a day." True; but the day was nearly consumed in getting and serving these two meals, with the after work that followed. To Mrs. Davis's surprise he did not hesitate to entertain visitors in his sleeping room if they arrived while he was there, and many of them would remain until "the wee sma' hours." There was a charm in fellowship with him, and ill and lethargic as he had grown, it was said: "Walt Whitman's friends rarely visited him without having a good laugh over something or other"; and "gifted with a clear resonant voice, the poet often gratifies his friends as he sits by a blazing wood fire—which is his delight—singing old-fashioned songs."

It was this irregularity that had worn upon his sister-in-law, for during the years in which she had endured Walt's thought-



lessness, she had had the care of Edward, the irresponsible, feeble-minded brother; and when, by the doctor's advice, she left Camden for the country, the home was tendered to Walt with this option: he was to conform to their way of living and cease turning night into day.

He did indeed have "runs of luck" after 1884, and who can deny that the greatest of these was in securing the undivided attention of a warm-hearted, unselfish woman, and in her making it possible for him to live untrammelled, in his own home? Surely the tide turned when this good woman ceased to be an independent being and became the strong prop on which he leaned; a shield between him and all annoyances.

While perplexed with settling the house, and having no time to go over the same ground twice, although the condition of the parlors troubled her Mrs. Davis had let them go, awaiting a favorable time to clean and regulate them thoroughly. This opportunity came in the summer, during the first of Mr. Whitman's temporary absences.

Since he had been in his own house, old friends had occasionally called to take him to spend the day with them. This time he was asked to remain a week. He gladly

availed himself of the change, and his house-keeper was no less pleased to have a week to herself. In it she did her best to restore order, and when she had finished was really proud of the improvement she had effected.

Mr. Whitman returned. He at once discovered what had taken place during his absence, and his consternation knew no bounds! He said that he had left *everything exactly* as he wished it to remain; where he could find it; now the very things he needed most were gone; in fact he could find nothing he wanted, and in the future he forbade *anyone* to meddle with his private property; he desired and expected to find—at all times and upon all occasions—his personal matters unmolested, undisturbed, left entirely alone.

Mrs. Davis mildly replied that she had only taken from the room some useless papers, scraps of letters, old envelopes, bits of twine and wrapping paper.

He declared that these were the very things he needed most; the ones he specially missed.

She remonstrated, but to no purpose; he silenced her; just how, she could not comprehend.

To Walt Whitman's credit be it said, he

never spoke an unkind word to Mrs. Davis; never was arrogant or overbearing to her; never belittled her or put her down before others; always treated her as an equal; relied upon her judgment and often sought her advice;—but he would have his own way, and she with her yielding nature soon gave in; the struggle was only a short one; before winter commenced, confusion once more reigned.

In due time piles of periodicals were stacked on the table and on chairs; newspapers, letters, envelopes and bundles of manuscript were in the corners; and as he had immediately set about the work he had so greatly at heart, cuttings, rejected scraps of paper and general litter soon covered the floor, the confusion gradually making its way into the next room and threatening to invade the hall.

The front parlor became a veritable editor's sanctum; nothing but the smell of printer's ink and the sound of the press were wanting.

Some of his poems he altered and revised again and again, and in a short time the large waste basket Mary had placed in the room was filled to overflowing. As he would not allow her to remove or empty the basket,

it became the foundation of a hillock of débris. Sometimes when he seemed off-guard she would surreptitiously remove a few dust pans full, but he was not deceived, and even this she had to discontinue.

The first summer and fall in his own house were decidedly pleasant and beneficial to Mr. Whitman. He worked as he felt able or inclined; was encouraged with the progress he was making, and gratified with the prospect before him. He believed, and must have seen, that situated so advantageously the one desire of his life was to be consummated, and that even though it were to be accomplished in a slow way, he would live to see his book completed and in a form to meet his most sanguine wishes.

Visitors retarded his work, but this was no real detriment, nor did he feel the time lost that he spent in returning visits. Making over the old material and adding to it the poems he had composed since the issue of the last edition, was something he could lay down and take up at any time. And he certainly did enjoy agreeable company, delighting whole-heartedly in their companionship as he dispensed the hospitality of his own board.

By degrees Mrs. Davis accustomed her-

self to her new surroundings and was no longer astonished at any of Walt's remarkable ways or unreasonable requests; besides, she remembered that the step she had taken was after all self-imposed, that all her friends had protested, and that it was now irrevocable; so with good sense and in good time she became, if not fully reconciled, at least resigned. She didn't exactly regret coming to Mickle Street, but she could judge from the few months she had passed there what the years to come might bring; yet even with this outlook she resolved not to shrink from but bravely to face the future, whatever might betide; and so unconsciously she transferred to Walt Whitman the devotion she had given to others.

She seldom left the house when he was there alone, for with that enigmatical instinct chronic patients develop he knew, and always wanted something, whenever she was busiest or on a momentary absence. Therefore after awhile she put all other considerations aside, and gave her full energies to the work she had undertaken; individual wishes were surrendered as she strove to adjust her ways to the erratic ones of the old man; familiar customs were discarded and former friends neglected. She seemed almost to

lose her personality and to become a part of the house and the peculiar life lived there.

She was never obtrusive, and did all things in a quiet manner. If company lingered until midnight she remained up to assist her charge to bed; she humored his vagaries, and always had a smile and a pleasant word for him. When he was inclined to be despondent, she cheered him; when he was in pain, she had some simple remedy at hand; when he was in danger of overtaxing his strength, she gently cautioned him; and if the disorder of his rooms troubled her, she did not let him guess how much.

At first she supposed he was not in a position to purchase new clothing, and did her best to make him presentable in what he had, while she patiently awaited the time when the expected money should come in; and through her efficiency in washing, darning, patching and mending he soon presented a much improved appearance, often commented on.

His brother, his good sister-in-law, his other relatives and all his friends rested in peace. They knew the hands he was in, the shoulders upon which the burden had fallen.



## V

### CURIOUS NEIGHBORS

*"Mr. Whitman and his housekeeper were closely watched by some curious people who had never lived near a poet before. In addition they minded their own business. That Camden should contain two such people in one street was enough to create wonder."*

—THOMAS DONALDSON.

THE inhabitants not only of Mickle Street, but of contiguous ones, were deeply interested in the strange couple who had come to live among them, and kept a close watch upon every movement. Their vigilance troubled Mrs. Davis, for she could see no reason why anyone should be curious about them. It was different with Mr. Whitman, who never saw anything he did not choose to. "I don't think a man ever existed so entirely indifferent to criticism and slander." (*Sidney Morse.*)

If Mrs. Davis chanced to go to her front door, half a dozen women would appear at theirs; if she swept her sidewalk, her broom seemed to set in motion half a dozen others. If she left her house for five minutes or re-

mained away for hours, she would find sentinels awaiting her return. Sometimes as she was approaching home she would hear a shrill childish voice call out: "Mama! Mama! here she comes!" Or she would see a young urchin—presumably on guard—scamper into the house to give the alarm.

"They seemed always upon the alert, and saw to it that whatever went into Mr. Whitman's house should have an eye escort in and an eye escort out." (*Thomas Donaldson.*)

From behind curtains, shutters and blinds Mrs. Davis could see and instinctively feel eyes fastened upon her, and what appeared especially remarkable was that this intrusive neighborly interest failed to die out or lessen with time. It was a matter of genuine personal curiosity, keen and continuing, and not of the transient attention any newcomer might awaken.

Unquestionably there was an atmosphere of perplexity and perhaps suspicion in the locality. For one thing, extravagant and impossible as it may seem, it had been rumored about that some people who entered "The Poet's" house never came out again. A frequent caller during Mr. Whitman's first years of housekeeping says:

"Opposite, as I slid into the house one



day, sat a bundle of dirt with bread and sugar upon it, on watch. As I hurried in I heard it yell, 'Hurry, Mama! A fat man at Whitman's door!' and presently a female watcher of two hundred and fifty pounds pattered to the door, wiping her fat arms on a checked apron. I heard her say as she retreated, 'Jimmie, watch if he comes out!' This confirmed the suspicion I had long had, that someone in the vicinity held that persons entered but didn't leave the Whitman house, and that they mysteriously disappeared." (*Thomas Donaldson.*)

This is no doubt curiously exaggerated; the woman probably only wished to get another glimpse of the "fat man" as he came out; but it is interesting as showing the feeling of a visitor. The effect of such conditions upon a woman like Mrs. Davis, living in the house itself and constantly exposed to the oppressive surveillance, might well have been serious. But she had a placid disposition and took things quietly. She was not at all disturbed because none of the older watchers made overtures towards an acquaintance.

It was different with the young people, however, for after their awe had somewhat subsided they began to be venturesome—to

show their hardihood perhaps—and soon became quite familiar, making the cellar doors (old-fashioned slanting ones) their regular rendezvous. Here they would come to “mind babies,” to hold mimic school and singing classes, to play games, keep house, take lunch and eat taffy purchased at a little corner store. Undoubtedly one inducement for their constant visits was the chance of getting one of the pennies that rolled occasionally out of the window above. Before summer had ended they had grown decidedly sociable, and in one of their favorite pastimes—running up and sliding down the cellar doors—each would pause for a moment at the top and peek in at the “good gray poet” as he sat anchored in his great chair, and ask, “How do you do to-day, Mr. Whitman?”

The poet’s original style of dressing was probably one reason why he attracted so much notice. He wore gray clothes, large of make and uncertain of fit, with an open vest, over which was turned the broad collar of his shirt. The latter, during his entire sojourn in Camden, was invariably made of a good quality of unbleached cotton. He preferred this to any other material, and he could not tolerate a separate collar, starched

bosom or necktie. He despised an ordinary pocket-handkerchief, and carried instead a generous piece of soft cotton or cheesecloth. His wide-brimmed hat, always looking the worse for wear, was usually turned up in front.

All this, with his size and long white hair and beard, made him a picturesque individual, and it was only natural that he should be recognized at once as a decidedly uncommon person.

Walt was an invalid and infirm, nevertheless when he was equipped and started he could go unaccompanied to Philadelphia and other nearby places. This enabled him to call upon friends, transact matters of business and keep in touch with the world generally. Sometimes he would take an extended ride on a street car, but the greatest source of enjoyment to him was a trip back and forth on the Delaware River. From the ferry boat he could feast his eyes upon ships—"those floating poems" (*his own words*)—either in the distance or passing close at hand. And here he was sure to meet some old acquaintance or to make a new one, and so feel himself still a factor in the busy bustling life around him.

Pleasant as were these rides to him, each

one brought more or less tribulation to Mrs. Davis, for governed as he apparently was by the impulse of the moment, she was never given warning of his intentions or allowed time for preparations. His excursions therefore were a trial she had not counted upon. He would not mention the ferry, or hint of going there, until he was seated at the table, or more likely had finished his breakfast. This made much extra running up and down for Mary, who could have simplified matters by having him dressed to begin with for the weather and the occasion.

This did not seem to occur to him. Crippled, slow, and requiring so much assistance, and feeling that neither his own time nor that of anyone else was of much account, it was often past noon before he was ready for the start. Then Mrs. Davis, who always saw him safely on the street car, would hurriedly don her outer garments, for Mr. Whitman had little patience with delay in other people. The housekeeper helping the poet down the front steps was a sight none of the neighbors would willingly lose, therefore the couple always sallied forth under the musketry of glances shot out at them from every direction.

When walking in the street Mr. Whit-

man carried his cane in one hand, and with the other he clung tightly to the arm of his companion. His size and weight (even now, in spite of his invalidism, he weighed two hundred pounds) would have made a fall a serious matter.

The street cars—horse cars, running at fifteen minute intervals—on their way to the ferry crossed Mickle Street at the first corner above. If unfortunately one was missed, it seemed a long and tedious wait for the next. To Mrs. Davis this was both tiresome and embarrassing; embarrassing because of the lookers-on, and tiresome because during the delay Mr. Whitman depended mainly upon her arm for support.

All the conductors knew the picturesque old man, and were obliging and attentive to him. When he was entrusted to their care Mrs. Davis had nothing to fear; she was also confident that he would find a helping hand wherever he might go, so quickly doing her buying and errands she would hasten home, where a myriad of duties awaited her.

Mr. Whitman never gave a clue to his calculations—if he happened to have any—and consequently there could be no certainty as to the length of time he might be away.

However, in the case of a ferry ride a few hours might be counted upon. Of these Mary would make full use; then as the afternoon lengthened and dinner time approached, she would grow restless and commence going to meet the cars. The return route was two blocks away, but the distance could be shortened by way of the back gate.

If Mr. Whitman was not in the first car met, she would hurry back, accomplish what she could in the next quarter of an hour, and then go again. Frequently when the car was not on time, some domestic calamity would occur; the fire would go out, or something burn, or a pot boil or stew over. In this case she would make what reparation she could in the limited time allotted her, then go again. This order of things would be kept up until Mr. Whitman's arrival; then would come the slow walk home, and the equally slow removing of wrappings, over-shoes and so on.

He always returned hilarious, braced up by the good time he had enjoyed, and totally unconscious that his housekeeper had had any extra work whatever, or a minute of anxiety on his account. The rides were indeed trying to her, and in pleasant weather



he would go no less than three or four times a week.

Following the ferry ordeals, there came another unlooked-for tax, that of getting him ready for winter engagements and taking him wherever he had to go. There would have been less trouble in this if he had possessed a suitable outfit, but as he had made but few additions to his scanty wardrobe, the threadbare garments needed constant renovation. He had sufficient shirts, however, now; for soon after getting into his own house he had given her money for material, and she had made him six new ones. He himself superintended the cutting out and putting together, as they were to be fashioned with exactitude after the old pattern. With one of them he was particularly pleased, for around the collar and cuffs Mrs. Davis had sewed some lace edging of her own. This shirt he kept for special occasions, and never put it on without making some pleasant remark in regard to the trimming.

But of the two, Mrs. Davis had much the more pride in his appearance, for she had learned that he was often invited to meet distinguished people. She accompanied him on his way to all social gatherings, and un-



less other escort was assured, called for him. This, however, was of rare occurrence, as guests began to vie with each other in seeing him home. She also went with him to places of business in Camden and Philadelphia, at which times he depended upon her alone, both going and coming back. The task of walking with him was doubly burdensome when the roads were rough and uneven, or slippery with snow and ice, which caused him to cling to her arm with a grip of iron. He had lost strength in his lower limbs, but gained it in the upper, as Mary often realized, though Mr. Whitman was unaware of the severity of the pressure.

As he could not carry his cane in his left hand, the entire strain came upon her right arm, and as he became more and more dependent upon her, these walks grew almost unendurable; especially so when, for some purpose or other, or upon meeting a friend, he would thoughtlessly stand to talk, never releasing his grip.

## VI

### MR. WHITMAN DRIVES

*"I swear I will never again mention love or death inside a house, and I swear I will never translate myself at all, only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air."*—WALT WHITMAN.

*"For such a lover of nature not to be able to get out of doors, was a calamity than which no greater was known."*

—THOMAS DONALDSON.

THE first winter over, spring came and was passed in about the same daily routine; but before the summer was far advanced Mrs. Davis was convinced that the old man's walking days were rapidly drawing to a complete close. This troubled her greatly, and during one of Mr. Thomas Donaldson's frequent evening visits she talked earnestly with him about it.

Mr. Donaldson, the poet's intimate and constant friend, was a practical man; one ready to listen to the suggestions of others, and to assist in forwarding their plans. Between him and Mrs. Davis there was a mutual understanding; each knew the other's worth. He had always shown consideration

for her; had sought her out in her own house, and stood manfully by her side in her ministrations to the invalid.

She told him she was certain, from the number of letters Mr. Whitman received, his many visitors from other cities and abroad, his increasing list of invitations and requests for personal interviews, that he must be a man in whom others were deeply interested.

She said that for some time she had had a plan in her mind. It was this: that he should write to Mr. Whitman's friends—as he knew just who they were—and solicit a subscription of ten dollars from each of them, the fund to be appropriated to the purchase of a horse and carriage for the poet's use.

Mr. Donaldson fell in with the scheme, and thirty-one of the thirty-five letters written by him received prompt replies, and in each was the sum asked for. As the gift was to be a surprise, only a few friends were let into the secret. A comfortable buggy was ordered and a gentle pony selected, as it was supposed the drives would be quiet ones, in suburban places.

On the fifteenth of September all was completed, and Mr. Donaldson came over

in the afternoon, ostensibly to make a call. He found his friend on a lounge in the front room, and seating himself commenced to chat with him upon the topics of the times. This he continued to do until he heard the gift carriage drive up to the door. His young son Blaine sat by the driver's side.

Mr. Donaldson went to the window, and Mr. Whitman hobbled after him to see who had arrived. "Bless me," he said, "what a fine turnout! And there is Blaine! Well, well, how the lad does seem to fit it; how comfortable it does look! What does it all mean?"

"It certainly does look comfortable," Mr. Donaldson replied, "and Walt, it's yours." This statement he repeated twice before his astonished friend could believe he had heard aright, and even then he did not appear to take in or comprehend the full meaning of such an announcement. While still dazed and hardly himself—impassive as was his natural demeanor—his friend handed him a letter containing the names of the contributors, in an envelope with \$135.40 enclosed. Mr. Whitman read the letter and was completely overcome; tears trickled down his cheeks, and he was unable to articulate a word.

When he was somewhat composed, Mrs. Davis, who had been slyly watching the scene, came in with his coat and hat, and proposed that he should at once—and for the first time—take a drive in a turnout of his own. It proved to be a long drive, as it was late in the afternoon when he returned.

Mrs. Davis was delighted; the gift surpassed her highest expectations, was much nicer and more expensive than she had thought it was to be; and she rejoiced to see the poor old man, who not two years before had shuffled to her door, now riding in a carriage of his own!—and one provided, too, by those friends he had told her of, friends she had believed to be but myths conjured up in his own lonesome mind.

Mr. Whitman deeply appreciated the compliment paid him. He said: "I have before now been made to feel in many touching ways how kind and thoughtful my loving friends are, but this present is so handsome and valuable, and comes so opportunely, and is so thoroughly a surprise, that I can hardly realize it. My paralysis has made me so lame lately that I have had to give up my walks. Oh! I shall have a famous time this fall!"

Previous to the presentation an arrangement had been made at a nearby stable for the care of the horse, the running expense of which was to be met by a number of friends; a young man was also engaged to harness the horse and drive the rig to the door. But who was to summon it? That part being unprovided for, it fell to Mrs. Davis, and Mr. Whitman became as erratic with his horse as he was with all other things. Some mornings it would be: "I must give up my ride to-day, the weather is so uncertain"; soon after: "It looks like clearing up, I will go"; then on Mrs. Davis's return from the stable: "I have made up my mind to defer my ride." Again would come the determination to go, followed with the afterthought of remaining at home, until ordering the carriage and countermanding the order would keep the obliging messenger running to and from the stable until dark.

Riding was so great an enjoyment to Mr. Whitman that when once in his carriage he was loth to leave it. "Only one thing seemed to have the power of forcing from him an occasional lament, and that was prolonged stormy weather when bad health kept him indoors for days and weeks."



Poor Frank, the pony, had not been selected for speed or endurance, and in an amazingly short time he succumbed to over-driving. At the expiration of only two months, Mr. Donaldson says, "the pony showed the effects of Mr. Whitman's fast driving, and had a shake in the forelegs—or rather tremble—that gave the impression that he was getting ready to lie down . . . Some weeks after this I was again in Camden, and while on the main street I saw a cloud of dust rising from a fast-approaching vehicle. In a moment a splendid bay horse attached to a buggy came into view. He was coming in a mile in three minutes' gait, and to my amazement, in the buggy was Walt Whitman holding on to the lines with one hand for dear life. When he observed me, he drew up with great difficulty and called out, 'Hello, Tom, ain't he splendid?' My breath was about gone. I managed to speak. 'Mr. Whitman, in the name of common sense what has come over you? Where is Frank?' 'Sold; I sold him. He was groggy in the knees and too slow. This horse is a goer, and delights me with his motion.' "

The ready sale of Frank was a great mortification to Mrs. Davis, and she felt it



keenly; the more so as the pony had been, in a measure, the outcome of her suggestion.

Although the horse and carriage were "a source of infinite joy and satisfaction to Mr. Whitman, and aided him to pass three years of his invalid life in comparative ease, giving him touches of life and air and scenery otherwise impossible," they were a constant expense and vexation to others.

He seldom went for a drive alone, and as a rule chose as his companion one of the many young men of his acquaintance. He always wished to hold the lines himself. Although Mrs. Davis was the usual messenger to and from the stable, although she got her charge ready for his drives, assisted him to the carriage and almost lifted him in and out of it, neither he nor anyone else ever proposed that she should have the pleasure of a drive, or suggested that an occasional airing might do her good.

While owning the horse Mr. Whitman did not wholly discontinue his ferry rides, but he no longer "haunted the Delaware River front" as formerly.

What a change two years had made in his surroundings!—and what a change in those of Mary Davis! He had come more prominently before the great world; she had

nearly passed out of her own limited sphere. The tide which turned when they entered the Mickle Street house was now in full flood for him. But what for her?

His book had had a good sale; private contributions were sent to him, amounting to many hundreds of dollars; and from this time on he did little with his pen, though he got occasional lifts from periodicals for both old and new work, and the *New York Herald* paid him a regular salary as one of its editorial staff. But he resigned this position the following year.

## VII

### BROOMS, BILLS AND MENTAL CHLOROFORM

*"He detested a broom. He considered it almost a sin to sweep, and always made a great fuss when it was done."*

—EDDIE WILKINS.

*"The tremendous firmness of Walt Whitman's nature grew more inflexible with advancing years."*

—HORACE TRAUBEL.

THE second winter in Mickle Street passed much like the previous one. To Mr. Whitman it brought heavier mail, an increase of complimentary notes and invitations, more numerous requests for autographs, steady progress with revision-work, a little new and profitable composition, the delightful companionship of old friends, the pleasure of making new ones, and the comfortable assurance that come what might, there was a capable captain at the helm, who would on all occasions guide the ship of affairs smoothly along. To Mrs. Davis it brought the same old round of work.

The next spring and part of the summer were charming seasons to the poet. In

them he revelled in his turnout; was sought after, eulogized and lauded. His day-star was truly in the ascendant.

This acknowledged popularity was a revelation to Mrs. Davis, who often asked herself, "Where were these friends—the ones in particular who have always lived in Camden—when a short time ago poor old Mr. Whitman, homeless and uncared for, so much needed their help?"

But as his popularity increased and grew more marked, as letters and invitations came pouring in, and as at certain gatherings she knew him to be the honored guest, it began to dawn upon her that his poetry—the poetry she had so often heard derided—might mean something after all, and she set herself assiduously to studying it. Finding so much that was beyond her comprehension, she sometimes sought elucidation from the author. This he never vouchsafed, and gave but one reply to all her questions: "Come, you tell me what it means." Unable to comply, she soon laid the book aside and gave her time and attention to other matters. Thus, failing to understand anything of his "soul flights," she no doubt was the better prepared to minister to his mundane needs. A domestic angel in the house

she certainly could be. An intellectual angel might have worried Mr. Whitman.

Yes, his day-star was truly shining. It was no will-o'-the-wisp he was chasing the day he came hungry and cold, weary and desolate to a good woman's door. Evidently he might have done better with his "little money" at that time, even if it was "only in sight," as "dribblets were occasionally coming in." With these dribblets he might have kept himself more presentable, seemed less of a derelict. But he had one preëminent need: he needed Mary Davis, and he got her.

She had not peered into the future with his prophetic insight, and in helping to open the way for the good times to come—times he had told her so much about—she had been governed by her kind heart alone. Her associates had never spoken of her protégé in any too flattering terms, and weighing all poets by his local standard, had congratulated themselves that not one of them was in danger of ever degenerating into such genius.

By midsummer Mr. Whitman had visited in and near Camden, and had made two or three trips to Atlantic City and New York. Everyone was kind and considerate to him,

wherever he might be, and as a reliable person always accompanied him on these expeditions, Mrs. Davis was never uneasy on his account, and his absences were her opportunities for resting up and putting the house to rights. Nor did she altogether skip the parlors, for she had somewhat lost her confidence in Mr. Whitman's gift of missing the very thing that was gone. Another Mary—an unfortunate woman; but who ever attached themselves to Mrs. Davis who were not in some trouble or other?—used to come in to assist when extra help was required. Her field of action ended at the kitchen door when the master was at home, for she stood in great awe of him and knew better than to appear in his presence with any order-restoring implement in her hands, especially a broom. But how she exulted when he was at a distance; when she could pass the old boundary unchallenged, and could rub and polish to her heart's desire, and according to her own ideas of cleanliness. She was often heard to remark that Mr. Whitman was the most "unthrifty" man she had ever met.

Mr. Whitman might be able to control the use of brooms about his own premises, but his authority did not extend beyond.



How the women of the locality learned of his antipathy to sweeping, either in or out of doors, is not known. Probably in some unguarded moment he had condemned it in their hearing. "He was extremely annoyed by the habit the women of his neighborhood had of coming out two or three times a day with their brooms, and stirring up the water in the gutter. He thought it caused malaria. If they would only let it alone!" (*Thomas Donaldson.*)

It may be that the women made their brooms an excuse for tantalizing "The Poet." He was no less opposed to their sweeping in dry weather, and one morning when six or seven appeared simultaneously and set to sweeping with a will, he knew that it was nothing less than a concerted plan, and this he would not endure. Irritated beyond self-control, he let his indignation fly out of the window in passionate and pointed sentences, which the sweepers totally ignored.

In 1867, about four years after his general breakdown, he had commenced to give occasional lectures. This spring (1886) he delivered two, the first on March 1, in Morton Hall, Camden, the second on the afternoon of April 15, in the Chestnut



Street Opera House, Philadelphia. Both lectures were upon the same subject, his favorite theme: Abraham Lincoln.

He was not an orator, and his audiences were at all times made up of people more curious perhaps to see than to hear him. This second lecture—his last appearance but one as a speaker in the “Quaker City”—was a greater strain than he had calculated upon, although the arrangements had been made for him by his friends, and he was conveyed from his own house direct to the back door of the theatre.

He always remained in his carriage while crossing the river.

Few people attended this lecture, and out of the \$692 it netted him, only \$78.25 was received at the door. The rest was made up by appreciative admirers. Two gentlemen gave each \$100, four gave \$50 each, eight gave \$10, two \$5, and a society—The Acharon—gave \$45. The money was handed to Mr. Whitman in a large white envelope as he left the stage. It was not removed from the envelope until the next forenoon, when it was deposited unbroken in the bank.

During the summer Mr. Whitman sustained a sunstroke, fortunately not a serious

one, but while suffering from the effects of it he was obliged to give up his jaunts and remain indoors. However, on pleasant evenings he could sit in a chair on the sidewalk, under his one cherished shade tree, into the bark of which he soon wore a hole with the restless movement of his right foot. Of the passers-by there were few who did not know him; many would pause for a moment's speech, others would occasionally get a chair and remain for an hour's chat. He soon recovered, but if the similar stroke he had suffered a few years before had served "to lower his fund of strength, weaken the springs of his constitution and almost wholly destroy his walking powers," (*Thomas Donaldson*), there was certainly little encouragement in store for him.

His housekeeper, too, had her physical troubles. She had visibly changed; how could it be otherwise? The back part of the house was gloomy, at times damp and unwholesome, and she had grappled with so many difficulties that she had lost strength and flesh, felt run down and nervous, while the "rosy cheeks" had faded forever.

This sickness not only made Mr. Whitman even more dependent upon her than usual, but it caused her great anxiety in another

way. She realized the great risk she had taken and was taking, for on coming into the house she had relied upon verbal promises alone; no written contract or agreement had been entered into.

Now month had followed month and she had waited in vain for the old man to allude to living expenses or inquire as to her ability to meet them longer. Strange as it may seem, since being settled in his own house Walt had never mentioned money, or in any way broached the subject of his financial standing.

During the first year she had not been at all disturbed in mind; she had confidence in his integrity, and believed he had no means of meeting present embarrassments. The next summer she saw that money was coming in from a number of sources, but had no way of learning the amounts received or in what way they were disbursed. This sunstroke and the consequences that might have resulted from it were enough to arouse her thoroughly. Not that she had lost confidence in Mr. Whitman, but it came home to her that should he die she would be in no way secured. Before long the bequest left her by Captain Fritzinger would be fol-

lowing her own savings, which were rapidly dwindling away.

After thinking the matter over seriously, she resolved that as soon as the sick man had somewhat recuperated she would make an effort to have things put on a new and safer basis. She knew that from private donations, sale of books, government pension, receipts from lectures and so on, he had opened a bank account. She also knew he was paying one-half the expenses of Edward at a sanitarium and was sending a weekly remittance to his sister in Vermont,—and knowing all this, she felt that she was being treated with injustice. She had already spoken to Mrs. Whitman and to one or two others, and they had assured her that Walt was abundantly able to meet all household expenses, and would without doubt do so in his own good time.

She had never solicited his confidence, and yet while they were strangers, or comparative strangers,—long before she had entertained the slightest thought that she should one day exchange her home for his,—he had talked freely, even confidentially, to her; had voluntarily spoken of his money matters, his past disappointments and future expectations. But since she had come into the

Mickle Street house he had never renewed these subjects, and his way of passing them over was inexplicable to her.

When the first repairs had been made in the house, she had taken the bill to him for approval and payment. He had simply glanced at it, and returned it with the words: "I think it must be all right." She had remained standing in the doorway until, silent, seemingly absorbed in his reading and oblivious of her presence, he had made her feel so uncomfortable that she had quietly glided away to pay the carpenter out of her own purse. This happened so early in their housekeeping together that she, so charitable by nature, had excused him on the ground that, having no money, he had disliked to talk further about the bill. But a year had passed, she understood his position better, and she could not excuse him again on this plea. She had mentioned the urgent need of further repairs (and when were they not needed in this little rookery?) and he had promptly replied: "Have it done; certainly, certainly; have everything done that is required." The result was still the same; although ordering the work, he was just as indifferent as before in regard to settling for it.

And so it had gone on in all cases where money had been needed, until Mrs. Davis, who was neither dull nor obtuse, saw that it was merely a matter of choice with him whether he paid for things promptly or not. The receipted bills she had carefully filed away, but what proof had she that they had been met with her own money?

At the expiration of the second year, Mr. Whitman at his own expense had the water carried upstairs and a bathtub put in. This was a blessing to both of them, and Mrs. Davis ungrudgingly saw a portion of her own room—the one little back chamber—sacrificed that it might be made possible.

Up to the time of the sunstroke she had made a number of futile attempts to introduce the subject of finances, but he had simply uttered "Ah!" (what a world of meaning he could put into that monosyllable!) and had silenced her with a look.

An observer says: "I found Whitman sitting on the front stoop talking with a negative pugnacious reformer. The poet entertained his ideas without a trace of impatience or severity of judgment, and yet he was capable of quietly chloroforming him if he became too disagreeable." Another writes: "This leading trait of his character



lasted until life glimmered faintly." It was this "leading trait" that prevented Mrs. Davis from introducing any subject not pleasing to him. Again: "He has his stern as well as sad moods; in the former there is a look of power in his face that almost makes one tremble." Mrs. Davis had no fear of Mr. Whitman; he never gave her cause to tremble, but he quietly chloroformed her times without number.

The expenses of the house were not light; amongst other things, two coal fires in winter, and a wood fire much of the time. Wood was a luxury to him, but it was an expensive item to his housekeeper, and the little stove in his sleeping room devoured it like an insatiate monster. "He enjoyed a wood fire." Then she supplied his table and entertained his guests—his many guests. She never bothered him; was always on hand and ready to help him to mature his plans, however inexpedient or impracticable they might appear to her.



## VIII

### VISITING AND VISITORS

*"His haunt on 'Timber Creek' is one of the loveliest spots imaginable; no element lacking to make it an ideal ground for a poet, or study place for a lover of nature."*

—WILLIAM SLOANE KENNEDY.

*"April 11, 1887. I expect to go to New York to speak my 'Death of Lincoln' piece Thursday afternoon next. Probably the shake up will do me good. . . ."*

*"Stood it well in New York. It was a good break from my monotonous days here, but if I had stayed longer, I should have been killed with kindness and attentions."*

—WALT WHITMAN.

IT was decided that Mr. Whitman should make one of his delightful visits to his friends, the Staffords, in their beautiful country home, "Timber Creek," just as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to take the trip, and Mrs. Davis thought best to defer talking with him or considering any definite step regarding home matters until he returned. She took pains to get him ready, and, as she had done before, persuaded him to purchase some new clothing and look his best. This visit, like previous ones, was charming to the poet, and he came home much benefited. While he was away Mrs.

Davis rested and paid a short visit to the aged parents of Mrs. Fritzinger in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. In this breathing spell she had thought home matters over and had planned her mode of procedure; but alas! when the poet appeared upon the spot and she had welcomed him, the courage she had summoned up when he was out of sight deserted her. She threw out hints, then made attempts to speak, but to no avail; an understanding was not brought about and things went on in the old fashion.

Much as Mr. Whitman enjoyed his visits and jaunts, coming back to his own home was the one great joy of his life, and meeting his housekeeper after even a brief absence was always a pleasure to him.

It was quite late in the fall when he returned. He resumed his work at once, and the winter was not an unpleasant one to him; only somewhat tedious, because he was so closely confined to the house. In other ways it was made cheerful with social events and agreeable company, and it was brightened with anticipations of the delightful drives to be enjoyed in the spring. (It was about this time that Horace Traubel commenced to come to the house.)

Each season had added to his popularity,

until he had attained the zenith of his most sanguine imaginations; his most potent day-dreams had truly materialized; he was fully on the crest of the wave! His housekeeping had surpassed his fondest expectations, for to him his home was ideal. Deprivation was a thing of the past; there was no lack of means, as private contributions were sent to him amounting to many hundreds of dollars. That he was poor and needy, and "was supported in his final infirmities by the kind interest of his friends, who subscribed each his mite that the little old frame house in Camden might shelter the snowy head of the bard to the end," was the universal belief, and a kindly feeling was manifested towards him in his own home and in England. It is to be regretted that he was not better fitted physically to enjoy all his later blessings.

Out-of-doors life seemed essential to him, and after a number of outings he was able, as early as April 6, 1887, to read his Lincoln lecture—the last he gave in his own city. It was well attended, and listened to with deep attention. On the 12th of the same month he went to New York for the purpose of reading his lecture there. He was accompanied by William Duckett, a

young friend who acted as valet and nurse, and it was on his arm the old man leaned as he came forward on the stage and stood a few minutes to acknowledge the applause of the audience. When the tumult had subsided, the poet sat down beside a stand, laid his cane on the floor, put on his glasses and proceeded to read from a little book, upon whose pages the manuscript and printed fragments were pasted.

"The lecturer was dressed in a dark sack coat, with dark gray waistcoat and trousers, low shoes, and gray woollen socks. The spotless linen of his ample cuffs and rolling collar was trimmed with a narrow band of edging, and the cuffs were turned up over the ends of his sleeves." Thus says the *New York Tribune* of the next day, and it cannot be denied that his appearance did credit to his housekeeper's attention at this time, as it did on all other public occasions. The "spotless linen," however, was unbleached cotton, one of the six new shirts Mrs. Davis had made for him.

The lecture was very successful. At the close, a little girl, Laura Stedman, the five year old granddaughter of the "banker poet," walked out upon the stage and presented Mr. Whitman with a basket of lilac

blossoms. The *New York Times* had this account of the event the next morning:

“Forth on the stage came a beautiful basket of lilac blossoms, and behind it was a little bit of a maiden in a white Normandy cap and a little suit of Quaker gray, her eyes beaming, and her face deeply impressed with the gravity of the occasion. She walked to where he sat and held out her gift without a word. He started, took it and then took her.

“It was December frost and May-time blossom at their prettiest contrast, as the little pink cheek shone against the snow-white beard, for the old man told his appreciation mutely by kissing her and kissing her again, the audience meanwhile applauding sympathetically.”

Mr. Whitman then recited his poem “O Captain!” and the curtain fell—fell to shut him from the sight of a New York audience forever.

Mrs. Davis always dreaded Mr. Whitman’s New York visits, and this episode caused her extra anxiety. She knew that his many and influential friends would give him a warm welcome and a great reception,

and she also knew how prone the poet was to go beyond the bounds of prudence. He could stand only a little fatigue and excitement now. He returned in good condition, however, and she flattered herself that a quiet summer was before them. He had told her that this lecture (which increased his bank account by six hundred dollars) was to be his last public function, but she had no knowledge of something else he had in near view; something he had already arranged for.

## IX

### A BUST AND A PAINTING

*"Sidney Morse has made a second big head (bust), an improvement, if I dare to say so, on the first. The second is the Modern Spirit Awake and Alert as well as Calm—contrasted with the antique and Egyptian calmness of the first."*—WALT WHITMAN.

*"Oh, that awful summer of 1887!"*—MARY DAVIS.

EARLY in the summer, when he had fully recovered from his exertions in New York, Mr. Whitman received a letter from a sculptor, Mr. Sidney Morse, requesting the privilege of coming to Camden at once, to make a plaster bust of him. The promise had been given to Mr. Morse for the summer, but the actual date had not been fixed upon.

Eleven years before this artist had made a very unsatisfactory bust of Walt, one he had always wished to improve upon. On the first occasion Walt had not entertained the thought of such an undertaking in his brother's house, but had gone to Philadelphia for the sittings. This time, as before, the choice of location had been left to



him; and it seemed almost incredible that he, who had been initiated in this line of art, should have imposed upon his housekeeper to the extent of giving his own stuffy little house the preference over a more suitable place.

He had answered Mr. Morse's letter, telling him he would cheerfully put himself at his disposal; the summer was before them, and nothing else impending. In short, he would engage himself to him for the summer, and he was confident the result would be better this time.

About two weeks elapsed, and nothing had been said to Mrs. Davis on the subject when one morning to her surprise the artist arrived, prepared to go to work without delay. Had she been consulted, she could have made preliminary preparations; had she been better informed she would have persuaded Mr. Whitman to select a different place, and had she been fully enlightened she would have insisted upon it.

Mr. Morse writes: "I found Mr. Whitman more crippled and quieter in manner than when we met before. Eleven years had wrought their changes. He was however in a less perturbed frame of mind."

Naturally so; in his own home, contra-

dicted in nothing, with his own carriage, and a devoted woman to wait upon him,—one who never intimated that there existed such exigencies as living expenses or household entanglements. It was left to the artist to tell Mrs. Davis the purpose for which he had come. He said that he was desirous of beginning his work as soon as was compatible with Mr. Whitman's convenience, and the poet seeing no obstacle in the way of an immediate commencement, it was decided that the first sitting should take place the following afternoon. Mrs. Davis was somewhat enlightened as to what the making of a bust implied when a load of mysterious and cumbersome articles drove up to the door in the morning. Puzzled both as to their use and where they could be housed, she had them delivered at the back gate and piled up in the yard.

Mr. Morse kept his appointment with promptitude, and after a few minutes' conversation with his subject, he summoned the housekeeper, and then, "the litter of everything under heaven was poked aside" to make a clearing by the window. Mrs. Davis assisted him in bringing some of the articles from the yard, such as boards and boxes upon which to fashion the clay; then

when the necessity came for something in which to mix it, her wash tubs were at once appropriated, and as smaller vessels were from time to time required, many of her dishes and kitchen utensils were one by one pressed into service.

During the first afternoon the work was put well in progress, and what a time was thus inaugurated! Before the week ended there was clay and plaster on all sides. The two men, interested in the bust alone, were oblivious to everything else, and passed the time chatting in a lively strain. The artist was satisfied with his work and delighted with the prospect of being undisturbed until its completion. He writes: "My deep satisfaction overflowed to the housekeeper, who admonished me that there was an element of uncertainty in Mr. Whitman's programme nowadays"—and sooner than he had counted upon, her words were verified, for on the morning following her mild warning a telegram came and "the damper fell," as Mr. Morse says. This was the telegram: "Am in New York and may arrive in Camden at any moment. Herbert Gilchrist."

"He's coming to paint me," said Mr. Whitman on reading the message; "I had

forgotten about him. We will put him over there somewhere; I don't see what I can do to stop it; he has come all the way from England—from England, Sidney, to paint me. Make the best of it, share the crust with him." "The damper fell" for Mrs. Davis as well, when Mr. Whitman in his usual off-hand manner announced the news to her. Another artist coming! a portrait painter! And Mr. Whitman who had known of this for an indefinite time had given her no warning, had taken her unaware. She was completely overcome, and not a little indignant. Had he really forgotten it, or had he thought it a matter of too little importance to mention? It was not often that Mrs. Davis shed tears in self-pity, but now they were her only relief. It was not the extra work and expense that troubled her most; it was Mr. Whitman's indifference towards her.

Mr. Morse was also touched, and confesses that in his disappointment he was half inclined to pack his traps and go. For a moment the housekeeper's mind tended in the same direction. "But," continues Mr. Morse, "when the young man appeared on the scene in person, I was calm once more and ready to be pacified." Mrs. Davis also

calmed herself and, as was her disposition, concealed her feelings and roused herself to meet the emergency. "The litter of everything under heaven" was poked still further aside, the stove was taken down and put into the cellar, things heaped and packed higher in the corners or carried out of the room, and a place made for the newcomer.

Mr. Gilchrist proved to be an agreeable, enthusiastic young man, and one never to get into another's way. Mr. Morse could keep his place at the window, and Mr. Gilchrist could place his easel a little way back, so that the sitter didn't need to change his position to be in a good light for both. But what of Mrs. Davis when paint and oil were added to plaster and the other refuse pervading the parlors? Had the confusion been confined to these rooms alone it could have been held in check, but for lack of room the kitchen soon became an auxiliary to the improvised studio. Again quoting Mr. Morse: "For a week we kept it up, working some, talking more, Mr. Whitman's wistful eye on us both."

This favorable state of affairs was, however, of short duration, for after the first week the progress of the artists was unsatisfactory; they were hindered by constant

interruptions, and as company began to pour in upon them, some days would pass and find little accomplished by either. It seemed a fatality that so many people should have chosen this very time to make their visits, especially people from abroad. Before long the strain of it told visibly on Mr. Whitman. Mr. Morse observed not only this, but the anxious look on Mrs. Davis's face as well, and on consulting her found she was much alarmed, and feared that their subject would give out unless some change could be made. The change was made when early the next morning the sculptor betook himself with his effects to the yard. This arrangement not merely gave additional space in the parlors where two or three spectators could sit or stand, but it also removed from them their chief attraction.

Some of Mr. Whitman's friends called daily, several twice or even three times in a single day.

Mr. Morse was satisfied with the new order of things and says: "In the cool shadow of the house, under a propitious sky (when it was propitious), with high boarded fence, and a grape vine wreathing itself into a pear tree for a background, my



work proceeded. Occasional excursions to the studio in front for memory sketches seemed to be serving me all right."

Up to this time Mrs. Davis had had undisputed possession of the yard, and this constant running back and forth was almost unendurable to her. For the excursions were not confined to the sculptor; all comers, casual or constant visitors, old friends and strangers, even ordinary passers-by—following the lead of others—deliberately took the right of way through the hall and kitchen, until it might as well have been a public passage from street to yard. Then in unfavorable weather, when the work could not go on, came another complication, as the unwieldy appurtenances had to be brought into the little canvas-covered alcove, shed and kitchen, obstructing everything. It was worse still in case of a sudden shower, when the things had to be hustled in anywhere and anyhow. But the front of the house! It was vacation time, and the "plaster man" and "painter man" at Whitman's were the great source of entertainment in the neighborhood. Children thronged the cellar doors from early morning until late at night; babies were held up to look in, and there was a general scramble



for the best point of view. Pedestrians, market people and others passing the house were attracted by this manifest excitement, and there was scarcely one of them who did not pause to satisfy his or her inquisitiveness with a peep. From a distance it was difficult to discern what could be taking place at the poet's, and everybody, old and young, even the halt and the lame, seemed to have time to walk an extra block or two to ascertain. However, as there was no alternative, Mrs. Davis was willing to bear it all patiently for a few weeks at most, as she supposed.

Mr. Morse, pressed by his host, fell into the habit of remaining to lunch; Mr. Gilchrist often joined them; and as in the course of conversation interesting subjects would come up, the day's work for both frequently ended at noon. Should incidental visitors arrive during meal time, they were invited without ceremony or apology to the kitchen, and Mr. Whitman always pressed them to eat something, regardless of the time of day or what might be upon the table. His talk was animated and arresting. He would usually begin with current events, then run into discussions on various themes, often intricate, and the two

artists felt themselves extremely fortunate to be the privileged recipients of some of his most striking thoughts and phrases.

It was at this juncture that one day an English gentleman accompanied by two ladies rang at the open door. Mr. Whitman had never met them, but seeing them from his seat at the table he welcomed them with these words: "Oh, darlings, come right this way, come right this way." On their complying he continued: "Herbert, Sidney, move a little. Mary, lay the plates and bring the chairs." (The extra ones hanging in the shed.) Then came a hitching and shuffling of chairs, and a crowding together. At first the party looked a little annoyed, but when they were fairly seated they soon became so absorbed in the poet's talk and in his associates that, unconsciously to everyone except the housekeeper, lunch merged into dinner. But this was no unusual occurrence. Indeed there were days when Mr. Whitman would remain at the table from lunch until a very late hour, company coming and leaving in relays. This summer, and for some time previous, he had dispensed with the regular breakfast, taking an early cup of coffee and a piece of toast in his own room. But the other meals cer-

tainly involved plenty of work and patience. Well might he say: "Mrs. Davis has a knack of anticipating what I want, and in case of emergency at the dinner table knows right well how to make the best of it. She has rare intelligence and her tact is great." She indeed had tact. "Jolly dinners you have here," quoth one distinguished visitor, notwithstanding they were served in the little heated kitchen.

Mrs. Davis always waited upon the guests in a pleasant genial manner, and few knew to whom it was due that the "jolly dinners" ran so agreeably along. Her watchful eye detected when any article of food was getting low, either for present company or when their places were about to be taken by newcomers. A thousand times she slipped out quietly to the little side gutter and ran (she always ran) to procure a loaf of bread, an extra supply of butter, crackers or cheese. The home-made supplies rarely gave out, as she provided bountifully for all. Mr. Whitman had good reason for going on to say, as he did: "I am well pleased with my housekeeper. She does better for me than a whole retinue of pompous bothering waiters. I detest the critters; bowing and watching"—and probably expecting their

just remuneration—for to complete his appreciation of her virtues he could have added: “And she furnishes the means.”

Yes; the lingering lunches and “jolly dinners” were paid for out of her fast decreasing bank account, as was everything else. It was doubtful if Mr. Whitman realized in how many ways he was indebted to her, or if the idea ever occurred to him that he could ask too much of her. So confident was he of her always making “the best of it” that nothing agitated or worried him. Yet this entertaining anyone and everyone in the kitchen often placed her in unpleasant and embarrassing predicaments. Of these he seemed to have no knowledge, as he never made an attempt to extricate her from one. Visitors were often more observing, and no doubt most of them saw under what disadvantages she was placed. Some of them kindly helped her over difficulties, and others just as kindly passed awkward little occurrences by apparently unnoticed.

Although Mr. Whitman did not mind what people said or thought about him, Mrs. Davis was sensitive and criticism hurt her feelings. She knew full well that she was sometimes blamed, by visitors who did not

understand the conditions, for things for which she was not at all responsible. She knew that to her charge was laid the air of negligence that pervaded the house, and even Mr. Whitman's bluntness towards certain people.

"There were grim and repellent traits in Walt Whitman. He was naked of manners and suave apologies as the scarred crag of the Matterhorn of verdure."

That physical suffering was many times the key to the old man's roughness Mrs. Davis understood, and she had a mild way of smoothing it over and putting other people at ease. She always spoke highly of both the artists, and in many ways they were more considerate of her than was their host. With things going on as they did, both were retarded in their work, and each in turn became discouraged. Mr. Whitman would sometimes be out of humor for sitting, or so worn out and ill that he could not come downstairs until late in the day; or again, when all looked promising he would order his carriage, drive off and leave them in the lurch.

Consequently each work of art required more time for its completion than had been calculated. Mrs. Davis did her best to en-

courage both the sculptor and the painter, and in every way she could devise, endeavored to forward their work. She removed obstacles; she influenced their sitter, and persuaded him to be quieter, to avoid over-exertion and excitement, to see less company and to lie down during the heat of the day.

At length both bust and picture were finished. Each proved to be highly satisfactory, and by many they are thought to be the most lifelike representations of the original. Of the bust Mr. Whitman himself said: "I am quite clear *this* is the typical one; modern, reaching out, looking ahead, democratic, more touch of animation, unsettledness, etc., etc. Not intended to be polished off, left purposely a little in the rough."



## X

### REST—AND ROUTINE

*"Heat, heat, heat, day and night! . . . I am still getting along through the hot season—have things pretty favorable here in my shanty, with ventilation (night and day), frequent bathing, light meals, all of which makes it better for me in my shattered helpless condition to tug it out here in Mickle Street, than to transfer myself somewhere, to seashore or mountains. It is not for a long time, anyway."*—WALT WHITMAN.

MR. Whitman had reached the limit of endurance when the artists bid him and Camden adieu, while Mrs. Davis, with the constant demands upon her time and strength, the condition of the house, unlimited entertaining and lengthened working hours, had completely succumbed. Another thing that had been to their disadvantage was the extreme heat, for it had been and still was an extremely hot summer—a Jersey summer. Each was prostrated, and for awhile rest and relaxation alone could be thought of. A short lull that followed the recent turmoil, however, and succeeding cool weather, did much towards their recuperation; but unfortunately sick-headaches, which



had been occasional with Mrs. Davis, now became persistent; her vitality was gone, and her courage was on the wane. In fact she never fully recovered, nor did she ever forget "that awful summer of 1887."

But while she was so miserable and ill she was not forgotten by her old friends, who rallied at once to her assistance, and it was through their thoughtfulness and kind attentions that a general and final collapse was avoided. None of them had been willing to give her up altogether when she moved into the Mickle Street house. She for her part had never willingly neglected them; one or another, understanding this, had run in the back way at odd times, and if by chance they had found the kitchen in her undisputed possession, had gladly remained to lend her a helping hand.

Nor with her multiplicity of new duties and in her new surroundings had she been unmindful of her habit of protectiveness, and this house became, as her own had been, the temporary shelter for some orphan girl or boy, some friendless woman or stranded young man. Crowded as it was, the little Whitman home could make room for an emergency case.

As the owner was just now confined for

some weeks to his sleeping apartment, Mrs. Davis could lie upon the kitchen lounge when the kind ministrations of her friends relieved her of immediate household duties; then in turn rouse herself, drag herself upstairs and attend to the wants of the sick man there. Her helpers were glad to prove their friendship for her, but it didn't reach the extent of waiting upon the disabled poet; this rested with her alone. Not that they were afraid of him, or that he had ever been rude or impolite to them, but not one of them was exactly at ease in his presence.

By good fortune, at this opportune time a gentleman and his wife invited Mrs. Davis to accompany them upon an excursion to Southern California. At first she declined the invitation; the distance seemed so great, and Mr. Whitman was so poorly, there was no telling what might happen during her absence. But she was still pressed to go, and unknown to her the project was broached to Mr. Whitman, who highly approved of it. Finally she accepted the proffered kindness; her friends assisted her in her preparations, and she set off with pleasurable anticipations. This journey was the one great delight of her life, and she returned much benefited. But how about the

good little woman who had strongly urged her going, who had added her earnest persuasions to those of the others, and who had offered her own and her daughter's services in place of hers? Poor little woman, she did her best willingly and uncomplainingly; but she did openly avow at the expiration of the three weeks that had Mary stayed another day, she would have gone insane.

During his housekeeper's brief absence, Mr. Whitman had found how truly his home was not home without her. He frankly told her this, and acknowledged to her that no one living could fill her place to him; that others around him irritated him—unconsciously, he knew—while she instinctively soothed and quieted him, overwrought and impatient as he might sometimes feel. Furthermore, he presented her with a nice gold ring.

Soon after her return, Walt, who was quite himself once more, paid another visit to the Staffords, and getting him ready for this trip was her first work on reaching home. "Timber Creek" was his favorite resort, a haunt he so thoroughly enjoyed that it flashed across the mind of a friend while sauntering about with him there, that it would be a capital idea to raise a "Walt

Whitman Cottage Fund," and build him a little summer home there. On cautiously sounding Walt upon the subject, he eagerly responded: "Oh, how often I have thought of it!"

So it was decided to build a cottage here, or by the seaside somewhere, where he could spend part of the year with nature and away from the noise and turmoil of the city. Eight hundred dollars were quickly raised towards the fund; the site for building, tiles for the chimney and plan by the architect were donated; but alas, it was seen that it was too late in his life for the scheme to be feasible, and the money was cheerfully given to him by the contributors to be used as he thought best.

On this particular occasion Mrs. Davis was more than glad to be alone. The parlors were much as the artists had left them, and a general housecleaning was instituted. And such a cleaning! Everything had to be handled and looked over, discarded or packed away. It was a disheartening task. Dried paint and plaster were on every side and resisted all attempts at removal, as though they had learned the lesson of persistency from the late sitter; besides, some repairs had to be made against the coming

winter, and the stove had rusted in the cellar.

In good time all was accomplished and order again restored. Mr. Whitman returned refreshed, and oh, so glad to get back to his own home once more. But as a matter of course he acted as though beside himself for awhile, and the old act of hunting for lost or missing articles was repeated. Mrs. Davis, however, who had taken more than one lesson from him, passed his perturbation by without apparent notice. She knew the time was not far in the future when rapidly failing health would altogether prevent his leaving home; he would probably be confined to the upper part of the house, perhaps to his bed; and she thought it wise to be in readiness for whatever was in store.

Although he had been situated so auspiciously for his comfort, and in a way to attain the great object he desired, Mr. Whitman's past four years had not been all sunshine. He had had spells of deep depression, days when he felt no inclination to come downstairs, or even to speak; and during the winter of this year the dark cloud hovered more persistently above him than ever before. For one thing, there were weeks when extremely cold or stormy

weather prevented his going out of doors. Mrs. Davis had much sympathy for him while the dreary mood lasted, and in many ways endeavored to dispel it. During the inclement weather she found in her cheery canary bird a valued assistant, and knowing the old man's fondness for the little fellow, she would at times stealthily place the cage in his room, "and let the sun shine out for a moment, this bird would flood the room with trills of melody." (The canary outlived Mr. Whitman, and through his long sickness, lasting from the summer of 1888 to the spring of 1892, it was always a welcome visitor in his room.) This would act as an inspiration, and Mr. Whitman would often take this time to write to some friend, always mentioning the singing of the bird and the shining of the sun.

"Pleasant weather as I write seated here by the window, my little canary singing like mad."

"Sunny and summery weather here, and my canary is singing like a house on fire."

"Dull weather, the ground covered with snow, but my little bird is singing as I write."

Good cheer may have been another comforting agent, for he writes: "We have



(Mrs. Davis has) just had a baking. Oh! how I do wish I could send the dear frau one of our nice pumpkin pies, a very little ginger, no other spice."

"A cold freezing day. Have had my dinner of rare stewed oysters, some toasted Graham bread, and a cup of tea."

"Have had a bad spell of illness again, but am better to-day. Have just eaten a bit of dinner for the first time in over a week—stewed rabbit with a piece of splendid home-made bread, covered with stew-gravy."

"Have just had my dinner—a great piece of toasted Graham bread, salted and well buttered with fresh country butter, and then a lot of panned oysters dumped over it, with hot broth; then a nice cup custard, and a cup of coffee. So if you see in the paper that I am starving (as I saw the other day), understand how."

In speaking of Mrs. Davis in a letter of the previous summer, he writes: "Very hot weather here continued. I am feeling badly, yet not so badly as you might fancy. I am careful and Mrs. Davis is very good and cute."

"Am idle and monotonous enough in my weeks and life here; but on the whole am



thankful it is no worse. My buying this shanty and settling down here on half, or one-fourth pay, and getting Mrs. Davis to cook for me, might have been bettered by my disposing some other way, but I am satisfied it is all as well as it is."

Through the winter Mr. Whitman plodded on with his literary work, and by spring the parlors were once more transformed into a regular printing and mailing establishment. To these over-filled rooms he had added an oil portrait of an ancestor, a life-size bust of Elias Hicks, and a seated statuette of himself. He was very careful of the two latter works of art, and to protect them from dust kept them partially encased in newspapers. When a caller once slyly lifted the paper from the statuette, he found a colony of ants had made the lap of it their home. The bust of Hicks was very conspicuous, and looked spectral in its paper headgear. Mrs. Davis would occasionally remove the yellow and time-worn papers, and replace them with clean ones. The owner no doubt noticed this, but he had ceased to be too observant of some things, and had become more lenient where "Mary" was the offender. And Mary had learned

just how far she could go with impunity. In a way their lives had merged together.

It was a custom with Mr. Whitman to have his manuscripts set up in type before sending them away—even his “little bits” of newspaper contributions. This was done in a “quaint little printing office” in town, the proprietor of which was “an old fellow acquaintance” of Walt’s. In this matter, as in all others, he was very impatient, for the moment anything was ready for the press he would summon Mrs. Davis, regardless of time, weather or her own occupations, saying: “Take this to the printer’s, Mary, and tell him I want it *immediately*”; and although most of this work was done gratuitously, the “old fellow acquaintance” was decidedly accommodating to his honored patron, and often laid other jobs aside for his “odd bits.” He was as well always courteous to Mrs. Davis. It may be that he could not withstand her appeals for haste, and was willing to incommode himself to save her from fruitless trips to the office; for he knew that in an unreasonably short time the poet would demand his printed bit. In fact, so impatient would the writer often become, that to pacify him his good housekeeper would make half a

dozen trips to the office. Frequently he would correct the proof and return it for a second, perhaps a third or fourth printing, and frequently he would say: "Don't come back without it, Mary; wait for it."

It would have been inconsistent with Mrs. Davis's natural activity for her to remain sitting in a printing office for an unlimited time, therefore she usually took advantage of these opportunities to do a little shopping, make a friendly call, or even a hasty run to Philadelphia. The corrected copies were never destroyed, but, like everything else, were dropped on the floor. It was no wonder that "to some Walt Whitman's house was a sort of conglomerated dime museum." Strangers who called drew their own inferences and reported accordingly, and in this way contradictory stories were told and sent out into the world. Much that was false was believed, until the prevailing impression was that "he was living in poverty and neglect."

He was extremely non-committal, and his housekeeper never intruded her knowledge upon anyone, so it was natural that errors as to his home life should creep in. It was certainly difficult to credit that from sheer preference any human being could live in

and enjoy the state of disorder that was found in the Whitman house, thanks to the poet's peculiarities. But this manner of living suited him, and in it he found true comfort. It must be confessed that things were outwardly so indicative of neglect that mistakes were bound to be made, while little of the actual life was known or understood, except by intimate friends. "The junk shop jumble of those lonesome rooms," writes one; and again: "I found the venerable poet in his garret, living in neglect and want, cooking soup in a yellow bowl on a sheet-iron stove nearby." (*S. T. Packard in a magazine article.*) (The bowl merely contained clean water for the purpose of moistening the overheated atmosphere of the room.) Still further he writes: "Whenever his strength permitted he rose from his armchair with the rough bear-robe thrown over the back." It was really a white wolf-skin robe, a present to Mr. Whitman and of great service to him.

In truth the elucidation, explanation and straightening out of the various stories concerning the life of Walt Whitman in Mickle Street would require a volume in itself. No fancifulness, however, on the part of more or less observant visitors could rival

that of their subject, for "His imagination could and did convert the narrow walls of the house in Camden into boundaries of nations, seas, oceans, mountain-chains, vistas of Eden, forests, cities, palaces, landscapes, hovels, homes of the rich, and art galleries, so that Whitman was thus of the great world while out of it."

"A peculiar feature of Walt Whitman's rooms, those I mean which his housekeeper is not allowed to put into order, is the chaos and confusion in which his papers are coiled. The bump of order does not exist in his cranium." (*William Sloane Kennedy.*)

But visitors were left to their own impressions, and these were too often unjust to the woman who always did her best to prevent the confusion from growing still worse confounded.

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## XI

### A SHOCK, AND SOME CHANGES

*"You have a good housekeeper."*—E. L. KELLER.

*"Yes, good, square—tip-top—devoted to me. Behind all she has spunk, very sensitive, the least word sets her off. A good woman."*—WALT WHITMAN.

*"Sunsets and sunrises to his soul were almost equal to food for his body."*—THOMAS DONALDSON.

AT last the long tedious winter ended, and never was a spring more welcome to Mr. Whitman, for his acme of enjoyment was still to be out of doors. During the months when he was so closely confined to the house he had become even more dependent upon his housekeeper, had more often sought her companionship, had been more confidential towards her, and had repeatedly expressed his thankfulness that he was in his own domicile, and was so fortunate as to have her efficient services. He would saunter more frequently into the kitchen for a social chat, and preferred to take his meals there whenever he felt equal to it. Altogether, he was much more



domesticated. Still, he had been able to go out sometimes, had taken part in a number of social gatherings, where he had enjoyed the pleasure of congenial company, had even had "some jolly dinners" in his own house; but nothing could compete with the delight he experienced when he was under the blue sky. His drives were absolutely joyful to him, and the first one set all his recuperative forces in action. His rapid gain was distinctly perceptible, and everything looked hopeful and promising.

On May 31, 1888—his sixty-ninth birthday—a lawyer, one of his later friends (*Mr. Thomas B. Harned, Horace Traubel's brother-in-law*), and one at whose hospitable board he was often found, gave a reception and supper in his honor. It was a most enjoyable affair.

But four days later, after a lengthened drive Mr. Whitman was tempted to visit the river bank to contemplate the setting sun. He imprudently prolonged his stay until the evening dampness caused him to feel a sensation of chilliness, which increased momentarily until upon his reaching home it terminated in a real chill, followed by still more serious consequences, for from it resulted a paralytic shock. It was not a heavy



shock, but was quite violent enough to cause alarm. At the first symptom Mrs. Davis summoned a physician, and did everything in her own power to alleviate his sufferings. He was seriously ill throughout the night, and next day had two recurrences of the shock, one in the morning and the other at noon. After the third it was believed, even by his physicians, that the termination of all was near at hand. For hours he was speechless, and to every appearance in a comatose condition.

His friend Dr. R. M. Bucke of Canada — who had come to Camden to attend the birthday celebration — had not yet returned home, and hurried at once to the bedside, where he was unremitting in his care and attention. Dr. Bucke was a skilful physician and a man of great executive ability, and his timely presence was a great blessing to all. His appreciation of Mr. Whitman as a writer, and his personal friendship for him, were of long standing.

To the surprise and relief of everybody, an unlooked-for reaction took place, and the sick man's first words on recovering his speech were: "It will soon pass over, and if it does not it will be all right." He was carried to his sleeping apartment, and from

this time to his death he used the front parlor only as a sitting room.

Dr. Bucke and Mr. Donaldson had talked much while their old friend was lying in the comatose state, and both were troubled that things were so complicated, and that no one in particular seemed to have the least supervision over him or his personal belongings. Both were surprised when they learned that he had never made a will, and had never offered a suggestion or given any directions in regard to his literary affairs. They were anxious as well, because they knew that in case of death, which seemed so close at hand, his papers and manuscripts would be scattered and lost. As to home matters, Dr. Bucke said that Mrs. Davis was worn out and a permanent nurse must be provided. This point Mr. Donaldson cordially endorsed. Of Mr. Whitman's pecuniary standing the Doctor had no knowledge, but Mr. Donaldson was better informed in regard to the sums he had received, and after consultation both fully agreed that the time had come when someone must take charge of affairs and no longer allow them to run on in the old haphazard way.

They decided to talk with Mrs. Davis,

and upon their doing this she gave them a correct, full and truthful statement of the facts of the case. She could well enlighten them on the subject of outgoings, and both men were genuinely astonished to learn that Walt Whitman had never contributed one farthing towards the maintenance of the house,—for repairs, supplies, furniture or fuel. She told them that while so many had been solicitous of Mr. Whitman's comfort and interests, she felt aggrieved that no one had ever exhibited the least consideration for her; that she had spoken to Mr. and Mrs. George Whitman a number of times, and they had assured her that Walt was in a position to meet all expenses of the house, and to the best of her belief they both supposed that he was doing this, though neither had made any inquiries of her. She said that in addition to her giving her time as general servant to all, her funds were rapidly diminishing, her goods going to rack and ruin, her health failing; and she felt that she could bear the burden no longer. She mentioned the promises Walt had made, and added that she did not doubt that in his way of thinking, and of doing things, he still intended to deal honestly and honorably by her; that she had endeavored to talk

with him and come to a satisfactory understanding, until she was convinced that he avoided the subject purposely. She felt that in no way was she secured, and it was a positive fact that two years more would bankrupt her. What she asked was a settlement on the spot, and that someone might be found to take her place.

*Take her place!* Was there a woman upon earth who could or would do this? It was a proposition that neither of her auditors would consider; up to this time the thought of her leaving had never entered their minds; indeed, no one had ever stopped to think that she might in time wear out and be obliged to give up, or perhaps get discouraged and go of her own free will. They urged her to abandon such an idea. What would the Mickle Street house be without her? The mere suggestion was the extreme of cruelty, for the sick man, although a little better at present, was too low for any change, especially one that would touch him so closely. Dr. Bucke gave her his word that he would be personally responsible for all she had spent, and for proper payment for her services as house-keeper both in the past and the future; he told her that her work would be lightened

immeasurably, as a regular nurse was to be engaged; and that in case Mr. Whitman should die before matters were settled, her interests should be carefully looked after. Relying on this promise, she remained.

In a few days Mr. Whitman's friends spoke to him and proposed that out of his bank account, which had grown to some thousands of dollars, he should hereafter purchase his own wood, pay for one-half the other fuel, keep the house in repair, and settle his private expenditures, to all of which he gave a ready and willing assent. Next day they advised his making a will, which he did, and it is known that in this he made some provision for Mrs. Davis, but its full contents were never disclosed, as he wrote it himself. On learning that according to Jersey law a woman could be the executor of an estate, he said it was his wish and desire that his esteemed sister-in-law, Louise Whitman, should close his. (This will was replaced by one made in December, 1891, during his last sickness.)

In regard to his literary matters, it was thought best that they should be placed in the hands of three executors, Dr. Bucke being one.

When it was made known that in future

Mr. Whitman was to have a regular nurse, some of his young admirers volunteered to solicit a monthly contribution from his numerous friends to meet this expense. The patient made some inquiries regarding the nurse fund, and on being told that it was all right and attended to, never alluded to the subject again. The task of keeping the fund up fell to Horace Traubel; for when it was first started people subscribed under the impression that it was a temporary matter, that Mr. Whitman's life hung on a thread, and that they would only be called upon once or twice; so all ran smoothly for a while. But as months merged into years some donors became tired of giving, while others found themselves unable to continue. Mr. Traubel was indefatigable in his endeavors to serve his friend. As one subscriber after another fell out, he called upon people or wrote to them in order to fill the vacant places. Besides this matter, in the four years in which he was connected with the poet he did much writing and corresponding for him, and was of great service to him.

The sick man improved slowly, and when there were no longer any indications of a relapse and everything had been satis-



factorily arranged, Dr. Bucke returned to his home; not however until he had again talked with Mrs. Davis and had once more assured her that full justice should be done, and that she need no longer feel uncertain as to her own well-being.

While Mr. Whitman was so very ill, there was no difficulty in securing a professional nurse. The first, a gentlemanly middle-aged man named Musgrove, left when the patient had in a measure regained his normal condition. Other nurses were in turn engaged, but the place was so undesirable, the duties so varied and uncongenial, accommodations so lacking and the remuneration so small, that after a short trial each one left, all of them testifying to the housekeeper's goodness to them, and to her unselfish surrender of herself to their patient.

After Mr. Musgrove's first few weeks there was not much regular nursing, and at Mr. Whitman's request Mrs. Davis did most of this; but there remained the heavy lifting and hard work. The wood was bought in cord lengths and thrown through the slanting door into the cellar, where it was sawed and split. The cellar was not only cold and damp, but the wood was often

wet and clumsy to handle. Besides sawing, splitting and carrying the wood up two flights of stairs, the nurse was expected to do sufficient carpentering to keep the house in repair, shovel snow in winter, run errands for his patient, and later wheel him about the streets in an invalid chair. This chair was purchased from the proceeds of a birthday dinner given for the poet in his own city, May 31, 1889. One hundred and twenty-five dollars were donated on the occasion, and as Mr. Whitman had now become too decrepit to use his carriage, that and the horse were disposed of, and the wheel-chair substituted.

There was so much trouble in getting a nurse who cared to remain, that late in the fall following the shock Dr. Bucke sent a young Canadian to fill the place. This young man, who desired to study medicine, had accepted the position with that object in view, and coming through personal interests alone he was naturally much engrossed in his own affairs, and never lost sight of his own advantages. He saw that by embracing this opportunity he could attain the necessary knowledge, keep a roof over his head (one that generally leaked, but this did not dampen his ardor), earn his board

and clothing, and have besides the great benefit of attending lectures in Philadelphia.

During the five months between the shock and the advent of the student nurse, Mr. Whitman had resumed his writing, and his bedchamber became his sanctum. Before his illness Mrs. Davis had managed to keep the upper portion of the house in passable order. Now it was gradually assuming the late appearance of the parlors, for here at least Mr. Whitman had full control, and would brook no interference whatever. When the nurse found that his best endeavors to bring about a change in this merely meant wasted time, he quietly went his own way and left his patient to do the same. He confessed that he thought him "the most singular mortal" he had ever met, and said: "When I was first employed he would chat ten minutes at a time with me; now we pass about twenty words a day. Keeps his own business to himself, and talks but little even with his intimates."

The young man's application to his studies appeared so commendable to Mrs. Davis that she at once set about trying to forward his efforts. The only method she saw was to do his washing, ironing and mending, that the small weekly sum thus

saved might go towards purchasing books he needed and could not afford to buy. He was delighted to own the volumes so obtained, and would pore over them for hours at a time, totally unmindful of the fact that the real donor was performing many duties that should justly have fallen to him. Having no room of his own, the kitchen was necessarily his study, and in a letter he writes: "Mr. Whitman calls me by knocking on the floor, I usually being in the room below."

Mrs. Davis always prepared the invalid's meals, carried them to him, and if possible sat with him when he partook of them. These were their times for exchanging confidences and chatting on home topics. "More than anyone else was she his confidant, and deserved to be." (*Thomas Donaldson.*)

He was interested in simple things, and little home talks never wearied him. He used few, plain and ordinary words in conversation, and his manner was simplicity itself. Mrs. Davis never spoke of anything unpleasant to him, and was always on guard lest others might do so; she was a good listener, not a loquacious talker, and her voice, naturally soft, had a soothing effect.

His literary matters were well looked after, and he seldom called his nurse except for some actual need. Such comments, however, as the following are misleading: "He treats his household as by a holy law, Mrs. Davis his housekeeper never finds him indifferent, condescending or morose. His spirit ignores all petty household worries . . ." (*In Re Walt Whitman.*)

Mrs. Davis also sat with the sick man, or within call, whether his nurse had gone on an errand for him, or to Philadelphia on his own account. And yet the student-nurse made no sign of reciprocating her many kindnesses to him; took everything she did for him as his just due; accepted any and every service she might render him, but most emphatically refused to give one in return. He left Camden the last of October, 1889, and returned to Canada. He parted both with Mr. Whitman and Mrs. Davis on the most friendly terms, saying that much as he disliked to leave them, his own worldly future depended upon other work than nursing.

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*"A time-worn look and scent of oak attach both to  
the chair and the person occupying it"  
(Letter from Walt Whitman)*

## XII

### ANCHORED

*"Am anchored helpless here all day, but get along fairly. Fortunately have a placid, quiet, even, solitary thread quite strong in weft of my disposition."*

—WALT WHITMAN (Aug. 22, 1890).

*"Whitman's stalwart form itself luxuriates in a curious great cane-seat chair, with posts and rungs like a ship's spars; altogether the most imposing heavy-timbered, broad-armed and broad-bottomed edifice of the kind possible. It was the gift of the young son and daughter of Thomas Donaldson of Philadelphia, and was made especially for the poet."*—WILLIAM SLOANE KENNEDY.

THE long confinement to his room covering more than half of '88, and extending into the next year, had forced Mr. Whitman to relinquish his summer and autumn drives. This was the one thing to which he could not be reconciled; the one thing to which he had looked forward so wistfully all the previous winter and spring. Alas! the fatal river drive was his last. As already explained the horse and carriage, now useless to him, were disposed of, and the wheel-chair took their place. This chair was indeed a boon to him, and he ap-

preciated the thoughtful kindness of his friends in the appropriate gift.

As soon as his strength would permit, which was some months after his attack, he had resumed his writing. He had also read his papers and periodicals, and thus managed to wear the long days through. The cheery canary had done his part in helping to beguile the irksome hours, and Watch, the coach dog, sure of a friendly greeting had made a daily call. Towards spring the time had been less tedious, and in March the invalid had become sufficiently strong to be assisted downstairs. At this he was highly encouraged, for he realized the advancement he had made.

While he had been so low in the past summer, Mrs. Davis had once more instituted a regular cleaning and renovating of the parlors. This he must have noticed, but he made no remarks in regard to it. He was led now to his favorite window, where stood his armchair with the white wolf-skin thrown over the back; in this he was placed, and day after day sat contentedly anchored. It was a sad disappointment to him when ailments occasionally prevented his coming downstairs; here he preferred taking his evening meal and meeting his friends.

Writing materials were always at hand on a small shelf under the window sill, but these he used only to jot down passing thoughts or to indite a friendly line.

Soon he could come into the kitchen, where he often chose to dine. Sometimes his friends would join him in a "jolly dinner" in the dear old place; but things had changed — were but a semblance of what had been — and his desire to remain undisturbed and with his housekeeper alone during meal times grew upon him.

During the summer and fall he had incidental outings with his nurse (Eddie Wilkins, the student). The first few were necessarily of short duration and slow of motion, then as his strength returned they were lengthened, and he realized the pleasure in store for him should his life be prolonged another year.

After each ride Mrs. Davis met him with some light refreshment, after which all he desired was rest — a long rest, sometimes of several days.

It was impossible to receive one-half of the people who called upon him—indeed, this would have been a tax upon a strong man. Mrs. Davis always answered the door bell; and it was no uncommon thing

for him to tell her that as he wanted to have a day of unbroken tranquillity, no one was to be admitted to his room — excepting always a number of dear old friends, and his ever-welcome brother and good sister-in-law.

Strange that these were often the days when visitors would flock there, the great majority of whom would leave deeply disappointed, and for this cause the inoffensive housekeeper — she who had to bear the brunt of everything — incurred the displeasure, even the enmity, of some people. So little was known to the world at large of the poet's private life and of his state of health, that strangers would sometimes go to certain persons in Philadelphia to inquire how they might have an audience with him. This condition of things did not develop until after the illness of the previous year, and much trouble resulted from it, as visitors would show their cards or letters of introduction and insist upon going to his room. Friends living either in Philadelphia or in Camden, especially those who saw much of the poet, should have been mindful that so sick a man might not at all times feel inclined to talk with strange people, or might not be equal to it if he



were so inclined. But his wishes or needs were not conformed with, and in some cases the protestations of Mrs. Davis were wholly disregarded.

She invariably met each individual pleasantly and never spoke hastily or abruptly to anyone; she always gave civil answers to their questions; often went to Mr. Whitman to intercede for them; and it was through her influence alone that many were admitted to his presence. But if he was not disposed to yield, her best efforts would be in vain, and the only alternative left her was to offend others instead of him.

During the seven years she was with him she had numberless strange or even unique experiences, but having quick perception she was seldom deceived. Some people would haughtily demand an audience with the poet; others would compromise by interviewing her, while the more determined would force their way in uninvited and positively refuse to leave the house until they had spoken with the owner. Many brought gifts which they wished to present in person; and veterans came asking that they might only clasp the hand that had ministered to them so tenderly at some time during the



civil war. Nor were souvenir fiends wanting, and many trinkets, ornaments and keepsakes belonging to Mrs. Davis were surreptitiously carried off.

A few people spoke slightly of the housekeeper, but never in Mr. Whitman's presence, for "Mary" was "Mary" to him at all times and in all places.

A number who had rendered him services—those in particular who within the last year or two had given money towards his support (as was supposed)—were indignant that Mrs. Davis should presume to speak so decidedly to them, believing that were their names only taken to Walt he would be delighted to see them. And yet a visit to the poet in his own house was to some people a decided disappointment, even when they were able to see and talk with him. They did not find what they had been looking for, something based on idle rumor and curious expectation, something extraordinary or even outlandish.

One of the most noticeable things about him, says one, was "an absence of all effort to make a good impression, or of posing." Instead of finding a gruff old fossil, or bearding a lion in his den, they found an everyday, quiet, dignified man.

### XIII

## WARREN FRITZINGER

*"He (Mr. Wilkins) left Mr. Whitman in October, 1889, and was succeeded as nurse by Warren Fritzinger, a young man of twenty-five, and a son of Mary O. Davis, his housekeeper and friend. Mr. Fritzinger (Warry) remained with Mr. Whitman until his death, a faithful, earnest man."*—THOMAS DONALDSON.

*"I get along well, am comfortable, have a fair appetite, and keep a good oak fire."*—WALT WHITMAN.

WHILE the question of getting another nurse was pending, Harry and Warren Fritzinger returned to Camden. It was a mutual surprise, for the brothers had lost trace of each other and came from different parts of the world. It was indeed a joyful reunion, and though seven years had elapsed since they had seen their foster-mother, their love had not abated and each brought her a substantial gift in money. Coming from California, Warren's gift was in gold—double eagles.

They remembered Walt Whitman as a man, but neither of them had read his poetry, and although their mother had mentioned

the change at the time it was made, they knew nothing of the way in which she was living, and both were much alarmed at her altered appearance. Not at all satisfied, they urged her to resign her position; to move into a more fitting place, and let them take care of her.

But believing, as did others, that Mr. Whitman's life was drawing to a close, she pleaded that she could not reconcile her mind to deserting him in his helplessness. She enlightened them in regard to financial matters, saying that she thought it wiser to wait quietly where she was until things were adjusted. Again, the house practically contained her possessions only, and these she could not think of moving at a time like the present; the sick man could not abide the confusion. She furthermore said that the house had become homelike to her, that all of Mr. Whitman's friends were kind to her, especially his sister-in-law, who made weekly visits, always bringing something with her; that she had implicit confidence in Mrs. Whitman, and knew that should any controversy arise in the settling of affairs, this upright and capable woman would be on her side. Again, she had pledged her word to stay; it was expected of her; and yet the

strongest argument came from her own kind heart—the old man needed her.

In her many talks with Warren she told him how she dreaded the coming of another strange nurse, even though his term of service was likely to be so short; and as she could not see how a few months, at most, could make any material difference to him, she did wish that he would make up his mind to apply for the position. Mr. Whitman's friends and literary executors at once caught at this, and all brought their influence to bear, pressing the place upon him and promising that, should he remain until Mr. Whitman's demise, they would stand by him and see him placed in some good way of earning a livelihood.

The situation had no inducements for him; it was in fact decidedly distasteful; but feeling assured that it couldn't really affect his worldly career, he consented. He was not one to do things by halves, and from the day he undertook this work until the last hour of his patient's life, he performed his manifold duties in a cheerful, willing and most capable manner.

He loved the sea, with its broad spaces, and soon the narrow limits of the little house became intolerable to him. This he

did not betray, and being naturally light-hearted and always appearing happy, few who met him realized the trial he was undergoing. He was honest and straightforward, and believed everyone to be the same.

Mr. Whitman, who had taken to him at once, was delighted when he was told that this bright "sailor boy" was to be his next attendant. Warren was indeed a blessing, not only to the patient, but to his mother, for he was always ready to assist her and to help out in times of need. But, better than all, he soon acquired a way of quietly managing the "good gray poet" that no other living mortal ever attained. When it was decided that massage would benefit Mr. Whitman, he took a course in a Philadelphia hospital and became a professional masseur, as well as wood-sawyer and amateur carpenter.

Good places were offered him, but he was bound, and could accept none of them. One excellent position was kept open for months and he was advised by his friends not to let so good an opportunity go by, but Mr. Whitman lingered on, and the place was filled. In going to sea as a boy, Warren was at a disadvantage on land. This he realized, and in the situation thus surrendered he had seen

a way in which he could retrieve his lost time.

Walt's literary attainments and associations were pleasant enough to encounter, but they were of no material benefit to him, and the remuneration was much smaller than he had ever before received. This was a great drawback, for having met a young lady whom he hoped to marry, he felt inclined and perfectly able to better himself.

As his predecessor's prediction, that Mr. Whitman would not outlive the year, was not verified, and New Year's Day, 1890, not only found him alive but in a much improved condition, with no indications of immediate danger, it came home to Warren that he had unfortunately tied himself to an uncertainty, and that his term of service might be years instead of weeks. There seemed no present help, however, so he philosophically accepted the conditions and stuck to his work with manly courage.

Warren's engagement commenced so late in the season that Mr. Whitman had but a few outings before another winter shut him in. He had however two or three trips to the river bank, which he enjoyed greatly; all the more because they led to conversations on ships and ocean life. Warren was



a fluent and interesting talker, which made him an enviable companion for anyone who, like the poet, was an ardent lover of freedom and the boundless deep. He often referred to Warren as his "sailor boy," and said that he was of much service to him when he was at a loss about the names of different parts of a ship. The young "sailor boy" had a vein of poetry in his own composition, and although he might not be qualified to weigh the bard's words and their import in the same scale with some others, he got a clear insight into their meaning.

The sick man had his ups and downs during this winter, but was seldom confined to his bed more than a week at a time. When he was at all able, he was helped downstairs to sit by the window. He spent more time in the kitchen with Mrs. Davis, and took a lively interest in anything she might be doing; he talked to the birds, made a playmate of the cat, had fellowship with the dog—in short his home life resembled that of any old man in his own home and with his own kin. He would read and write a little at a time, or glance over his papers, but there was a perceptible falling off in all ways, and his domestic life became more and more dear

to him; it had no jars, ran smoothly along, and was to him his world.

He was still just as inflexible about having his own way. However, it had so long been a part of his housekeeper's life to yield to this, that he seldom had to insist upon anything. He would usually retire early now, though this was not a stated rule. He might be in bed by eight o'clock, or up until midnight, and he was as ingenious as ever in making work for other people. As his massage was to be the last thing before sleep, Warren could not calculate upon his own doings for a single evening. He might go out before dark, make a call or do an errand, then hasten home to wait up two or three hours or even longer; or on going out and remaining but a little beyond eight, would on his return find his patient in bed groaning, and saying that he had been suffering severely for his rubbing, or "pummelling," as he called it. Suffice it to say he was as exacting with his willing nurse as he had always been with his faithful housekeeper. During the two and a half years that Warren was with him, he had but a single untrammelled evening, for Mr. Whitman wanted him always near, even when no service was required. And so things jogged on satisfactorily to

friends and admirers, but tediously indeed to the young marine.

Horace Traubel writes: "Warren Fritzing, who attends upon Mr. Whitman and is provided for through a fund steadily replenished by a group of Walt's lovers—and who finds his services a delight—attests that whatsoever the hour or necessity, Whitman's most intimate humor is to the last degree composed and hopeful." (*In Re Walt Whitman.*) Others have written of this period as one of grave neglect; a time when the aged man was deprived of the care and comfort so essential to one in his condition. They underrated both his means and the attention lavished upon him.

"He is old and poor," says one, "and were it not for small contributions from time to time from friends who sympathize with him in his poverty, age and helplessness, would actually suffer for the bare necessities of life. For many years his income from all sources has not exceeded an average of two hundred dollars, which to a person in his helpless condition goes but a little way even in supplying the roughest and commonest of food and care." And again: "His wants are not many, for he lives simply from necessity and choice; but in his old age and constantly

failing health, he needs that comfort and attendance which he has not the means to procure."

The poet himself was neither discontented nor dull. As his infirmities brought new privations, he bowed to the inevitable. He missed the outdoor life keenly, but was grateful for such trips as he could get under Warren's care. As for indoors, conversations if protracted wore upon him, and he could no longer take part in them with anything of his old enthusiasm and vim. But there was no fundamental infirmity of mind, no childishness of senility; he was essentially young in his habits, thought and manner, and remained so until his death. Sometimes, indeed, the flame of mental energy rose high again; and it was never extinguished.

"The body was fading; the vital parts seemed reluctant to die even in their own exhaustion. The soul, the mind, the man were there, and at times in full vigor, while the case was wrecked. Grandly and clearly his mentality stood above the slowly straining and wasting body." (*Thomas Donaldson*.)

But others suffered with and through him. Warren had relinquished hope after hope, had on several occasions abandoned his resolve to better himself and get married; his

mother's entreaties and the reiterated promises and solicitations of Mr. Whitman's friends, especially his literary executors, were more than he could combat. But with all outward signs of contentment, the confinement soon left visible marks upon him; a second pair of rosy cheeks faded, and from handling the icy wood in the cellar a lasting cold was contracted.

He purchased a writing desk—one that fitted the niche between the chimney and the window in the anteroom—and here he wrote, studied and read when not actively employed; always busy, always within call. When the monotony and confinement became too pressing, he purchased a violin and took music lessons. He declared that this saved him from fits of desperation.

Mr. Whitman himself was not the only old person dependent for comfort upon Mrs. Davis and her sons, for the maternal grandparents of the latter, living in Beardstown, Pennsylvania, octogenarians and both amazingly jealous of the poet, had to be visited, looked after and consoled.

One great annoyance to Warren was Mr. Whitman's aversion to prompt payment. The old man had signified his willingness to purchase his own wood, but he was so de-

linquent about settling for it that the proprietor of the woodyard, a man whose heart had never been warmed by the poet's effusions, saw no reason why he should warm his body gratis, and so sent him bill after bill, until at length he refused to deliver a load until the previous one was paid for. Be it understood, Mr. Whitman intended to pay for his wood, but he intended to pay in his own time, and not be dictated to; consequently there was a controversy when each load was delivered. "His pride was adamant to anything that seemed concession." (*John T. Trowbridge.*)

Warren knew that the old man had money, that right was on the wood-dealer's side, and he would not follow his mother's way of putting people off—telling them that Mr. Whitman was too miserable to be troubled, asking for an extension of time, etc., then paying the bill herself and lacking the courage to present the receipt. No, "Warry" would approach the subject in such an original fashion and hand the bill to his patient in such an offhand way that it would appeal to him directly, and as a rule the money was counted out with a quiet chuckle. Eddie Wilkins wrote: "Mr. Whitman is stubborn and self-willed. You can only get along



with him by letting him have his own way." Warren would meet the stubbornness and self-will with just as persistent good-nature, and would usually gain his point. He was the only person Walt Whitman never chloroformed with one of his "Ahs!"

Early in April, 1890, the poet was asked to read his Lincoln lecture at the Art Club rooms in Philadelphia, and he agreed. He was just recovering from a bad spell, and Mrs. Davis did her best to dissuade him from such an undertaking, but without avail; he summoned up his resolution once more and had his own way. With the assistance of Warren and others, he dressed and painfully dragged himself to the place of destination, and there, before a gay and crowded assembly, he appeared for the last time in public as a speaker. But the effort was too great, and when the reading was ended and the congratulations over, he was taken home in a suffering and nearly unconscious condition and carried to his bed, where, exhausted and worn out, he was for some days obliged to remain. However, on May 31 he was sufficiently recovered to attend a birthday dinner at Reiser's in Philadelphia. When the guests were assembled—some fifty or sixty in number—Warren wheeled

him into the room, where without leaving his chair he joined in the convivialities of the occasion. He did not fear to dissipate a little at events like this, nor did he always pause at the point of prudence, for he knew that in whatsoever state he might reach home the best of after-care awaited him there.

During the spring and summer the chair rides were resumed whenever he was at his best, and he entered into the enjoyment with zest and appreciation. When feeling particularly well he would make up for lost time, until the rolling chair with its distinguished occupant and handsome boyish-looking propeller was often seen by the hour as it passed through the streets of Camden and adjacent suburbs. This chair stimulated the interest of the neighbors and whenever it was carried to the sidewalk the news spread quickly, so that by the time Mrs. Davis appeared with Warren, helping the old man down the stoop, they had a good-sized and extremely attentive audience. No doubt they had long since ceased to look upon Mr. Whitman as a mysterious personage, but they comprehended that he was not one of them, and everything new connected with him still excited their curiosity.

Warren's advent at a season when he was so needed was indeed a blessing to his mother. Now she could count upon her time and arrange for her work, could go out with no anxiety as to home matters, and could have the kitchen to herself when she wished.

The heat of this summer debilitated the invalid more than that of the previous one, or even of the famous (or dreadful) one of 1887, devoted so exhaustingly to art. For days the old man would now be too overcome for any outing, and would be glad instead to sit on the sidewalk, as of old, in the shade of his cherished tree. He spent some evenings with friends, and occasionally went out to a Sunday dinner or to meet certain people; but this became too strenuous, and the after-effects too serious.

The chair rides, though so often interrupted, were continued until late in the fall.

"Was out in wheel-chair yesterday, November 8, from twelve to two-thirty."

He made a few visits to the river, and seated in his chair took his last boat rides across it. In October he visited Philadelphia for the last time.

## XIV

### FRIENDS, MONEY, AND A MAU- SOLEUM

*"Christmas Day, 1890, was spent by Walt Whitman in giving himself and all his family a Christmas present for all eternity. He went out to Harleigh Cemetery, a suburb of Camden, to select a site for a tomb."*

—WILLIAM SLOANE KENNEDY.

ON the evening of October 21, Colonel Robert Ingersoll gave a lecture in Horticulture Hall, Philadelphia, for the benefit of Mr. Whitman. The subject was "Liberty in Literature."

This form of assistance to the poet was suggested to Colonel Ingersoll by Mr. Johnston of New York, one of Walt's oldest and most valued friends, who came to Camden to talk the matter over and make the necessary arrangements. Mr. Whitman took unusual interest in the project and was desirous of being present. Mr. Johnston, who had great confidence in Mrs. Davis and much regard for her opinion, consulted her upon the subject. She said that recent cool weather had done much for the old man,

and barring unlooked-for accidents, she believed that he could be counted upon. Mr. Whitman himself, who was well aware that his later appearances in public had proved a great tax upon his strength, declared his intention of husbanding the little that remained for the event. This he did; the evening arrived, the weather was favorable, and all was well.

Every possible exertion had been spared him, and he started off in high spirits. An easy carriage had been secured, and he reached the hall without fatigue; even in better condition than had been anticipated. He was accompanied by a friend, and by Warren and Mrs. Davis, for both Mr. Johnston and Colonel Ingersoll had insisted upon her being one of the party. On alighting from the carriage and entering the hall, Mrs. Davis was given a seat in the audience not far from the stage, and Mr. Whitman and Warren were taken behind the scenes, where the lecturer and some gentlemen awaited them. An armchair had been placed for the poet by the speaker's stand. A few moments before the lecture began, he came upon the stage and seated himself. He was greeted with enthusiasm by the overflowing house, and when the eloquent speaker had

closed his fine address, he arose, came forward and spoke a few words. This was his last appearance in public.

Colonel Ingersoll had engaged a room in a nearby hotel, where at the close of the lecture a small company were invited to partake of a collation and pass an informal, social hour. When all were seated at the table, the Colonel handed Mr. Whitman \$870 as his share of the proceeds, and upon doing so remarked to Mrs. Davis: "That sum will keep you all in comfort this winter." But like all other sums received by Mr. Whitman, it was deposited unbroken in the bank.

Mr. Whitman stood this exertion well, but the reaction came later; the borrowed strength gave out, and the winter found him much the worse for wear. He came downstairs a number of times in October and November, and had occasional outings, but he passed the time chiefly in his own room, and the big chair which Warren and his mother had carried up and down stairs, to the place where it was needed for the time being, was never again taken below. He sat up much less, however, and would lie upon his back for hours, with his eyes par-



tially closed and his hands crossed upon his breast.

Letters came with kind wishes and friendly words; these he appreciated, though he could seldom answer them. Yet he still read and wrote a little, still looked over his newspapers and periodicals, and the accumulating litter therefore received its weekly contributions; but at his mother's earnest request Warren did not interfere. When little things were carried upstairs, the old man would often ask that they might be left. If any article were taken up he would usually say, "Leave it a while longer; I may want it by and by." This accounts for the soiled dishes frequently seen in his room.

Old friends and new ones were constant, and seemed to devise ways in which they could shower attentions upon the sick man. The oysterman in the next street sent word that he was at all times welcome to a free share of his stock in trade, and there was no time when oysters were not kept unopened in the cellar; but Mr. Whitman beyond doubt overstepped the bounds of the donor's generous intentions when he treated his company so lavishly to stews and half-shells, also when he ordered supplies for his young men friends in return for services they ren-

dered him. Mrs. Davis and Warren did not approve of this, and each was ashamed to visit the little place so many times; they without money, and the oysters without price.

Did Mr. Whitman, in truth, have an accurate or an undeveloped knowledge of the cost of living?

Eddie Wilkins writes: "Oh, he knows the value of money, and is very careful with his own."

His benevolence to the sick and wounded soldiers during a great part of the civil war is an old and often repeated story, but in this he was to a great extent the almoner of others. His self-sacrificing labors as a volunteer visiting nurse were his own free-will offering, and from them came his long years of suffering, for his early paralysis was the result of these exhaustive and unremitted efforts.

"His devotion surpassed the devotion of woman." (*John Swinton, in a letter to the New York Herald, April 1, 1876.*)

Most of the time while he was living in Washington he occupied a small room up three flights of stairs. He had but little furniture and no dishes; he ate out of paper bags and subsisted upon a very meagre sum

of money. This sufficed for that period of his life, when he was in "his splendid prime." (*John Swinton.*) He had health, strength and only himself to think of; and taking a house of his own in after years—humble as was the one in Mickle Street—did not seem to mature in him any realizing sense of the intrinsic value of money, or reveal to him his own pecuniary obligations. He never seemed to question what housekeeping involved, never seemed to pause and think that certain responsibilities rested upon him alone, or feel that he might be wronging others, especially those whose services he accepted and whose embarrassments he never inquired into, never offered to relieve. But Mrs. Davis, conservative, conscientious, and true to him, did not disclose his domestic failures or discuss them with others. His financial standing was not revealed to his English friends, and remained quite a secret until the Christmas season of this year, when he was given a site for a grave in Harleigh Cemetery.

It is not unreasonable to believe that he had special designs in putting money so quietly aside, one of which—and the greatest, perhaps—was to build a family vault. It has been said that it was for this very

purpose he accumulated money; hoarded, accepted and saved in the most minute of things. Thomas Bailey Aldrich often told the delightful story of a certain \$9.00 which Whitman borrowed from him—magnificently, but also irrevocably—in Pfoff's restaurant on Broadway.

After he had accepted and secured the site, he spoke freely of his wishes and intentions regarding the tomb. He specified that certain members of his family should be placed in it, and requested in particular that his parents should be brought from Long Island to sleep with them there.

It was to be of granite, massive and commodious; and on a projection above the door was to be a granite statue of himself, standing. His ideas were excessive, and the expense far beyond his means; still, he may have thought that the proceeds accruing from his book would warrant an extravagance for death that he never vouchsafed to life. The tomb was begun according to his orders, but was finished on a much smaller scale—as it now stands—and just in time to lay him therein.

When it became known that preparations had been made to erect this costly mausoleum, it dawned upon some of his friends

that he had a way of keeping things to himself. It certainly did seem strange that some of them should pay a monthly tax for his support when he had means of his own, and could contemplate such an expenditure as this. In truth people were getting tired of the constant drain upon their purses, and many had long questioned why they should so frequently be called upon, and wondered what *could* become of the money that flowed in large and small streams into the Whitman exchequer. A few even suspected Mrs. Davis of appropriating it, and of this—unknown to her—she was accused. She was also charged with wastefulness, neglect of the invalid, and gross incompetence.

The poet still kept his affairs to himself, and "it may be he thought that what he received from his admirers was but a portion of the debt they owed him." (*William Sloane Kennedy.*)

January and February of this winter were hard months to the sick man. He suffered with severe headaches, lassitude and inertia, added to which he had long and obstinate spells of indigestion. He remarked to some old friends that he suffered somewhat from want of persons to cheer him up; most visitors came to him to confess their own

weakness and failures, and to disburden themselves of their sorrows. It was just the opposite disposition in his two constant attendants that made their companionship so agreeable to him. Warren's witty and playful sallies always provoked a quiet smile, and his mother's "inventive thoughtfulness" was rewarded with an appreciative, approving look.

During March he made some gain, but it was not until April 15 that he got out of doors to enjoy the sunshine and invigorating air. With his rides new courage came to him, and in May he was able to be taken to the cemetery to witness the progress made on the tomb. But in the last ten months of his life he was so worn by pain, and had so aged, that his restful, reliable home comforts were the dearest of all earthly things to him.



## XV

### THE LAST BIRTHDAY PARTY

*"There was one more birthday dinner celebrated with his friends in the Mickle Street house on May 31, 1891. Whitman was seventy-two. That privacy, which is the normal privilege of old age, was one of the kinds of happiness which he didn't experience."*—BLISS PERRY.

*"Munching a little bread dipped in champagne and talking about Death. He had never been more picturesque."*—BLISS PERRY.

ON May 31, when Mr. Whitman had reached the age of seventy-two, his last birthday (as it proved) was celebrated by a dinner given in his own home. This arrangement was adopted as the only means of ensuring his presence, and the gathering was the final social event in that little house.

The managing committee was composed of young men, most of whom knew nothing of the limited dimensions of the place, and had not reflected upon the incongruity of their undertaking; nor, until the plans were all made, arrangements nearly completed and the invitations issued, was Mrs. Davis told what was to take place. When the

youngest of the three literary executors, who had devised and was at the head of the scheme, finally informed her, she said she feared that such a thing as seating thirty-six people in the parlors was impracticable; however, she would do her best in helping them to carry out their wishes.

It was by good luck that the arrangements were in the hands of inexperienced, enthusiastic and hopeful young people, for the difficulties to be overcome would have discouraged older and more experienced folk at the outset. It was better still for them that they found a well-balanced mind, willing hands and managing skill in their home agent, as this alone saved them from ignoble failure. First the parlor doors, double and single, together with the hall and kitchen doors, secured with old-fashioned six-screw hinges, were removed and carried into the yard; the spare bed put up since Mr. Whitman's last stroke was taken down, together with the stove, and with the entire furniture likewise removed. This was literally turning the parlors inside out.

Mrs. Davis, as usual, succeeded in making a place for everything. Warren did most of the hard work and lifting, while his mother swept the rooms, cleaned the win-

dows, put up fresh curtains and made the place so presentable that the young men of the committee, who took kindly to her encouraging words and wise suggestions, acknowledged that they did not see how they could have managed without her ready and efficient coöperation. On the morning of the birthday she was of equal service to the waiters who, when the tables, chairs and dishes arrived, discovered many drawbacks in such an unlooked-for banquet hall.

The head table was placed across the front parlor, in a line with the windows, the other, the length of the back parlor, forming a T with it; and these, with the small chairs, so completely filled the rooms that only just sufficient space was left for the waiters to serve the guests through the two doorways. Most of the viands came ready cooked, and the caterer had done full justice to them; the coffee was made on the kitchen stove, which, with the little one in the shed, was brought into requisition for heating purposes. Mrs. Davis was usefulness itself in getting things in readiness, advising with the caterer and helping him out of quandaries. When the dinner had been decided upon she had been told that it should put her to no extra work; and when she made the matter

really possible she was told that she had done her part, which should end there, as the committee would attend to putting things to rights afterwards.

Getting Mr. Whitman ready, and seeing that he was in no way overtaxed, was of much importance, and it was carefully looked after. At the appointed hour, seven P. M., the guests assembled, and there being no reception room, each took his or her assigned place at the table; then, when all were seated, the venerable host was brought down. He was met with congratulations, and led to the head of the table. There were twenty-seven men and five women present, and not until the greetings were over did he and his old friends observe that Mrs. Davis had been left out. Room at the table was not wanting, as three chairs were vacant through the non-arrival of the expected occupants; besides, two of the ladies were strangers to the poet. Mrs. Davis felt the slight, although she could not very well have formed one of the company in any event, her presence being indispensable elsewhere.

It was a good dinner and well served, all things considered. The day was insufferably hot, and the windows and the front door were left wide open. Many noticed and re-

marked that during the dinner no loungers were about the front of the house, "no boys looking in, yelling or throwing stones or mud—no curiosity gazers. Respect for Mr. Whitman possibly prevented this." (*Thomas Donaldson.*) Respect for Mr. Whitman in part, no doubt, but a greater respect for a contract made beforehand; Mrs. Davis had bought them off; something good for each one of them for good conduct. She was not so successful in securing the same considerate behavior from Watch, her coach dog, for to her great mortification, just as one gentleman commenced to read "O Captain! my Captain!" he came into the parlor doorway, "put his nose up in the air and uttered a series of the most ungodly howls ever listened to." (*Thomas Donaldson.*) He continued to howl until the reading ceased, then abruptly left the room.

The dinner lasted until ten o'clock—three hours. A stenographer took down the toasts, responses, scraps of conversation, etc. But while these were at their height, one compliment, one little speech, was not recorded. Mr. Whitman looked around the table as if seeking something, and on being asked, "Is there anything you want, Walt?" replied, "Yes, I want a piece of *Mary's*

*bread."* It was brought to him. Mr. Whitman, no doubt, feeling that Mary had been slighted, took this peculiar way of his own to show his regard for her.

The next day the tables and chairs were taken away, but the committee's promises of assistance were probably forgotten, for regardless of the poor days Mr. Whitman passed in consequence of the dinner, and his need of extra care, no help whatever was proffered and Mrs. Davis and Warren were left to right the house by degrees, working as they could.

The summer following the invalid was glad to pass quietly in his room. The heat overcame him, for he had lost all his resistant power, and truly needed the attention and care that it was his good fortune to receive. Part of the time he was up and dressed, but he seldom felt equal to more than this. His outings were few in number, the reading fell off, and the writing was nearly discontinued. However, this did not prevent the litter in his room from mysteriously increasing in the same slow, sure, steady ratio. As this did not bother him, and he was inclined to be tranquil and satisfied, no one disturbed him, or interfered in any way with his idiosyncrasies.



His world had become contracted to still smaller dimensions; the four walls of his own room enclosed it. He had relinquished his hold upon outside life with its bustle and excitement, and more than ever wished to be left alone, left to himself. He was his own best company, apparently, for he often evinced disapprobation on being roused from one of his long reveries. At intervals he would seem to be the old-time man, would rouse up and talk, even jest, after which would follow spells of depression or dreaded indigestion. In the latter case, day would succeed day when his only nourishment would be a light cup-custard or a small glass of iced buttermilk.

The fall did little for him, and there was an unmistakable and steady decline until December 17, when after a number of miserable days he was seized with a chill, the precursor of pneumonia. For a week his life hung in the balance; friends and relatives were summoned, and the best medical advice was procured. Each hour the final call seemed at hand; then came a pause, and the issue was uncertain; next there was a slight improvement.

The burden of all this fell mainly upon Warren, who was only relieved temporarily

day or night by his no less worn-out mother. Believing that each day would be the last, each had held up and gone on, until on the 28th the limit of endurance was reached, and they asked for assistance. As the patient's symptoms were tending toward a protracted illness rather than a speedy death, his friends saw that this was imperative, and Dr. Bucke, who had recently arrived in Camden, went to Philadelphia to engage a professional nurse.

## XVI

### THE NEW NURSE

*"Well, I told you doctors when I was so very bad, 'let me go; let me die.' I felt you would not listen to a word . . . you would not think of it for a moment, and here I am.*

*"I chose to go. I may pull through it and have it all to go through again; it looks more so to-day than for a fortnight. You are all making a strong pull for me, I can see that."—WALT WHITMAN.*

THE requirements in the nurse were maturity, experience in the care of sick men, and the ability to take notes and keep a careful record. Dr. Bucke engaged a suitable person, and talked freely and unreservedly to her about the patient, his physical condition and his eccentric habits. He said it was his firm belief that his life could not last more than a few days longer, and that he was confident that another such room as the one he was in, littered and uncared for, did not exist upon the face of the earth. He further said that his poor old friend had been in wretched health for some years past, that he was in no way able to look out for himself, and that he was in the hands and

at the mercy of a designing and unprincipled woman,—the unrefined and ignorant widow of a sailor,—who as a housekeeper was unreliable and dishonest, and who alone was responsible for the condition in which the sick room was to be found. He added that it had been arranged that the nurse should go out to all her meals at the expense of the patient's friends; that she was to have nothing whatever to do with the housekeeper, *and above all things she was not to allow her to enter the sick man's room.* To put the matter to her concisely, she was, during the entire engagement, long or short as it might prove, to speak to but three persons, these being the two literary executors living in Camden, Mr. Harned and Mr. Traubel, and her own colleague, Warren Fritzingler. He told her that the first things he desired her to do were to get the sick room into order, and to begin recording the daily transactions; she must be careful to note all Mr. Whitman's words as they were uttered, and to write them down faithfully. Dr. Bucke spoke as one having full authority, and the nurse had no reason for disbelieving anything he had said. (And ever after believed that Mrs. Davis had been cruelly maligned (but by whom?) and

that Dr. Bucke, who lived at a distance and saw little of his friend's home life, had been deceived and misled.) He assured her that *money in abundance* would be supplied for all the sick man's needs, and that it was the wish of his friends that he should have every comfort possible until the end.

By a second appointment Dr. Bucke met the nurse at the ferry, and they set out together for the dying poet's home, the Doctor, while crossing the Delaware, repeating and dwelling upon what he had previously said.

The ring at the door was answered by a pleasant, ladylike woman, between whom and the Doctor there was a show of mutual good feeling. The back parlor was given to the nurse as her room, and when she had laid her wraps aside Dr. Bucke led the way upstairs. To the relief of all Mr. Whitman had made no objections to a lady as nurse, and when she entered his room he extended his hand. A number of gentlemen were present, among them his brother George and the two literary executors, who had remained to take leave of Dr. Bucke. An artist who had just completed some etchings of the poet had sent him six complimentary copies, one of which he presented

to his departing friend, at whose request he was raised up to autograph it. This, it was supposed, would be his last signature.

The prospect being that he would not only survive the night, but would pass it in comparative comfort, his friends and relatives left, excepting only his niece, Miss Jessie Whitman, the daughter of his brother Jefferson.

Poor Warren was overjoyed at the idea of going to bed, for in the last four days and nights he had had no rest, and since the chill, ten days before, had not found time to change or remove his clothing. While giving the nurse her instructions he confessed that he was completely done up, that such a siege as he had just passed through was worse than a storm at sea; nevertheless he wished and expected to be called at any moment if his services were required.

Mrs. Davis, totally unconscious of any ill feeling toward her and disposed to show every courtesy to the nurse, prepared a nice supper to which she invited her to come. What could the nurse do? No way had been opened for her to go outside to her meals—at least for the present—and no one except Dr. Bucke had mentioned such a thing; it was dark, she was in a strange



city and ravenously hungry. She could not make up her mind to refuse and run off at once to seek a restaurant, especially at a time like this; could not risk leaving a patient so dangerously ill, even for a minute; nor could she desert the two weary people who were looking to her for relaxation and relief. No; she would sooner fast for the night. But fasting was not necessary; so descending the stairs, passing through the hall and running headlong into the flour barrel, she entered the little cabin-like kitchen.

Mrs. Davis was so worn out for sleep that even while standing her eyelids would close. She apologized, saying that she had been awake so many hours she was not at all herself. The nurse begged her to lie down at once, believing this weary, sad-looking woman must be a relative of her patient's, or a dear friend who had come there to bridge over the present crisis. Dr. Bucke had not mentioned the housekeeper's name, and the kindly, hospitable person who had been introduced as Mrs. Davis belied in every way the description of the sailor's unrefined widow. Besides, Warren called her mother.

The sick man required but few attentions

during the night, and was so painfully still the nurse went to his bedside a number of times to assure herself that he was breathing. Warren came in twice to reconnoitre and turn him over, and when morning peeped into the window of the dull little anteroom and he found that no new complications had developed and that Mr. Whitman had not suffered from the change, he was jubilant over it.

After preparing breakfast, Mrs. Davis, as was her custom, went upstairs to sit with the patient while the others were below. She entered his room, and he—who up to this time had lain with downcast eyes, speechless, almost immovable—looked up, smiled, and exclaimed in a pleased voice, “Ah, Mary!” There was no mistaking the friendly relation between these two people, and before noon the nurse learned that the coarse housekeeper, the *dreaded* housekeeper, was no other than this pleasant, tired-out woman, whose kindness she appreciated because she had at once made her feel so much at home. What did the nurse think!

When Mr. Whitman was supposed to be dying, Mrs. Davis had in a way managed to meet the emergencies of the occasion; when a rubber sheet was called for, and no one

offered to procure or order one, she gave her own oilcloth table cover to supply the need. When extra sheets were in demand and were not forthcoming from any quarter, she bought a piece of cloth, tore off the lengths, and was obliged to use them unlaundered and unhemmed, for even in this trying time only one person, besides her personal friends, had offered her the least assistance or inquired as to the straits to which she was put. This single exception was Mr. Whitman's sister-in-law, who had left a sick bed to come to Camden and do what she could.

When with the coming of the nurse, and cessation from immediate anxiety, Mrs. Davis found time to look around, she discovered more than an abundance of work. An enormous wash had accumulated, her boiler had given out, and damp and cloudy weather necessitated drying everything within doors. Then as the eaves trough had fallen down, and the kitchen ceiling leaked, Warren's skill in carpentering was in instant demand.

They found the nurse willing to assist in any way, and the housekeeper was delighted that she was plain spoken and matter-of-fact, and knew almost nothing of her patient as a writer; that she regarded him only as a

sick and helpless old man, needing personal care, and not the adulation with which he was surfeited. Mr. Whitman himself took kindly to her, for like Mrs. Davis she never questioned him, and if she spoke at all, always touched upon the most simple, commonplace subjects.

On one occasion she ventured to say to him: "I suppose you would be disgusted with me if I told you that I had never heard of *Leaves of Grass* until I came here?" He laughed a little and replied: "I guess there are plenty of people in the world who can say the same. *Leaves of Grass* was the aim of my life. In these days and nights it is different: my mutton broth—my brandy—to be turned promptly and kept clean—are much more to me and appeal to me more deeply."

Little by little, much was accomplished; the sheets were hemmed, and the nurse with part of the small and only sum of money given to her soon had a new boiler on the stove; then when the table cover, which had become stiff, wrinkled and ruined, was replaced with a smooth rubber sheet, and a rubber ring purchased, which gave the patient great relief, and a few trifling articles secured, the money was exhausted. Mrs.

George Whitman added some things to the supply, after which it fell to Mrs. Davis to resort to her own means as of old, and one by one the gold pieces—Warren's gift—melted away.

In the course of a couple of weeks the nurse learned that she was boarding at the expense of the housekeeper, and finding that no arrangements had been made to this effect she wrote to Dr. Bucke, laying the matter before him, as it had been agreed that she should write to him semi-weekly and in full confidence. In her next letter she told him of her own belief in Mrs. Davis as a most excellent woman; she enlarged upon her devotion to Mr. Whitman and his fondness for her, and expressed her great astonishment that a man of his experience could be so mistaken in anyone. In reply he wrote that he was pleased to know that he had been misled.

Mrs. Davis was much distressed in regard to the cleaning of the sick room. She feared it would make Mr. Whitman unhappy, and she felt that as his life was to end in so short a time, further indulgence might be granted him. But he was found to be not at all disposed to make objections; indeed, he was passive in the extreme, and when the nurse in any doubt or difficulty

would occasionally appeal to him, he had but one reply: "Ask Mary."

To the surprise of everyone he lingered on, improving instead of growing worse, and by the end of the month had regained something of his former condition. He even wrote a few short letters, autographed the five remaining etchings, and a photograph for the nurse.

When the ominous symptoms had disappeared and he was not only out of danger, but quite comfortable, and Mrs. Davis had got the most pressing work well in hand, things assumed an almost unbroken routine. Warren took the night work, as reporters often came to the house at late hours and he was accustomed to meeting them; even friends would come thus unseasonably to inquire for the poet and perhaps beg for admittance to his room.

Yet there were many nights during the long sickness—lasting to March 26—when following a number of good days he would sink into a state of collapse, and then both nurses would remain up together.

As Warren did his home work in the forenoon, which was also his mother's busiest time, the nurse prepared the patient's breakfast and gave it to him; but seeing that he



really preferred Mary's presence to her own, she often exchanged work with her, and the only actual difference was that Walt had three nurses instead of two.

Getting the sick room into order was a tedious task. The nurse was directed to leave every scrap of paper with writing upon it in the room, to remove only the newspapers, magazines, circulars, bound books, wrapping papers and so on. Then there were days when it was evident that Mr. Whitman wished to be alone, other days when he was very low and could not be disturbed, still other days when he had long visits from friends; and the work would have to be postponed for the time being.

All the newspapers and magazines were stacked upon the landing outside the ante-room door; the books—usually dropped anywhere, open—were placed upon the pine shelves; the manuscripts were piled upon one side of the sick room, and the old envelopes, wrapping paper and odds and ends of string alone were thrown away.

Warren's desk came in nicely, and seated at this the nurse wrote her record, going into the details and minutiae of the case, as she had been instructed. In this Warren took his part, and as he knew most of the people

who called, his information and night notes were a valuable addition. A cot under the shelves in the anteroom, which had served as a bed for the nurses at night and a settee by day, was taken out and a comfortable lounge substituted, which had been hidden from view under the débris in the other room. This gave both rooms a better appearance, besides providing a more comfortable seat and sleeping place.

Mr. Whitman did not take medicine with regularity; only when some acute pain or persistent discomfort rendered it essential. His temperature was never taken, his pulse and respiration but seldom; and in no way was he roused up, except for an unavoidable cause, or perhaps to meet company. He fully understood his own condition, and pleaded for but one thing: rest.

When he had his poor days—when it seemed that he could not again rally—he saw no one, and in the last two months he wished to see few beside his nurses, his two doctors (Dr. Alex. McAlister of Camden, and Dr. Longaker of Philadelphia), and his faithful Mary. He said that others tired him, and yet many saw him and held conversations with him, even at this late stage in his life. Colonel Ingersoll came

twice, and sent him a basket of champagne, of which he took sparingly from time to time.

It was not so lonesome for Warren when there was someone associated with him in his work, and the nurse listened with interest to the stories he told of his early escapades, and of his subsequent adventures in strange countries and at sea. He could boast of having saved two fellow creatures from drowning, that is, if he were at all inclined to boast, which he was not. After awhile he confided the disappointments of his love affair, saying he thought it hard that after being engaged for over two and a half years, he had not, since he had assumed the care of Mr. Whitman, had the opportunity and pleasure of inviting and escorting his fiancée to an evening entertainment. The nurse thought so too; she sympathized with him; and his one untrammelled evening was when, unknown to his mother, she slipped over to Philadelphia, bought tickets and secured seats that he might have the gratification of taking "Coddie" to the theatre. This plot was several days in maturing, and when the secret was disclosed Mrs. Davis was terribly exercised, fearing that something dreadful might come up just at that particular time.

She tried to dissuade Warren from going, but it was two against one, and he went. Nothing eventful occurred; Mr. Whitman was at his best, and when he asked for "Warry," and was told where he had gone, he was perfectly satisfied.

But day by day the patient steadily declined, and as one of his lungs was nearly useless, it affected his breathing to such an extent that his only relief was in change of position—"shifting," as he called it when he was being turned from one side to the other. He could eat while lying down, but could drink only when his head was raised with the pillow to support it. Often when Mrs. Davis went into the room to turn him, or to take him some little home-made delicacy, she came out in tears. What was said when the two were alone—if they spoke at all—was never repeated, never reported.

Mr. Whitman did not know that the nurse kept an account of his words, or wrote anything whatever regarding him; for of all things he disliked, the worst was to feel that there was someone at hand or just out of sight with pencil and paper in readiness for instant use.

One day Warren told him that his brother Harry's Christmas present was a little boy

that he had named for him: Walt Whitman Fritzinger. This pleased the sick man, and he expressed a wish to see his little namesake. The child was kept in readiness for a week; then early one evening, when Mr. Whitman was feeling better than usual, he was sent for. His nurse brought him over, carried him into the sick room and laid him in the arms of the old man, who kissed the little fellow, held him a few minutes and repeated a number of times: "Well, well, Little Walt Whitman, Little Walt Whitman." There were present the child's mother and nurse, Mrs. Davis, Warren, and Mrs. Keller, Mr. Whitman's nurse. He never saw the child again, but often inquired after him, and added a codicil to his will bequeathing him two hundred dollars. (My name is on the codicil as witness to the signature.—E. L. K.)

The invalid had never bought himself a new mattress, and the one given him by Mrs. Davis seven years before—too wide for the bedstead and extending several inches beyond it at the back—had from long and constant usage become hollow in the centre, making it difficult to turn him from one side to the other, for he would often slip back into the hollow place. Warren

once said: "When I come on this side of the bed you slip away from me." "Ah, Warry," he replied, "one of these fine mornings I shall slip away from you forever."

One evening a member of the editorial staff of the *New York Evening Telegram* visited him. Mr. Whitman knew that he was coming, and had made up a little roll of his writings to give him. (Mr. Traubel always made these engagements, met the parties and accompanied them to the house.) Upon leaving, the gentleman said that the paper had raised a fund wherewith to purchase flowers for the poet's room. Afterwards learning that the defective lung made the fragrance of flowers stifling to him, the paper requested that the money be applied in some other way. Mrs. Davis suggested a longer bed and a firm, level mattress. This was agreed to, the money came duly to hand, and the two nurses went together to select the bed. The one decided upon was a single one, made of oak and standing at least three inches higher than the old one; the mattress was of sea-grass. When the useful gift, which was a surprise to Mr. Whitman, arrived and was being set up—February 22, 1892—Walt was seated for the last time in his big chair.



Warren said it would be a pity to have this bedstead battered up as the old one had been—for the old man still kept his cane within reach and often pounded upon the footboard; so he rigged up a bell in the anteroom, and carried the wire over the door and into the sick room, where a drop string came down to the bed. Mr. Whitman found this an easier way of summoning aid; it was the "quaint bell" mentioned by two or three writers.

When the patient was settled on the new bed, he looked at Mrs. Davis and said: "You can have the old one, Mary."

The *Evening Telegram* gift was a great acquisition, and it is to be regretted, for the sake both of the invalid and those who waited upon him, that it did not come in some way years before.

## XVII

### "SHIFT, WARRY"

*"Come, lovely and soothing death,  
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,  
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,  
Sooner or later, delicate death."*

—WALT WHITMAN.

*"She was his loyal friend and nurse. She stood by him  
in life, and closed his eyes in death."*

—THOMAS DONALDSON.

IN January, when Mr. Whitman first rallied, wrote the few short letters and autographed the pictures, his friends were much encouraged; but subsequent sinking spells destroyed their hopes, and his extremely low condition led them to believe that he would wield his pen no more. In his poor days scarcely a word was spoken in the house, and his three nurses worked silently, almost mechanically, about him. Then with another temporary reaction, hopes were again renewed and a change in everything was manifest; even the dull little anteroom seemed brighter.

On February 5, he had so far regained his strength as to request writing materials.

His old way of writing in bed was to be firmly propped up, with a pillow before him on which to rest a light smooth-covered book. Now he was too weak to hold the book, and although well supported at the back he found it an almost insurmountable task to indite even a few words. Mrs. Davis believed he could do much better were something devised on which the paper before him could rest firmly. She was equal to the occasion, for going to a young artist and teacher of painting (a young lady named Miss Button) next door she procured a drawing board, to which she had legs attached,—two short stationary ones in front, and two longer at the back, fastened with hinges—thus making it adjustable to almost any angle. The invention worked well, and the next day, when he again requested pen and ink, it was placed before him. He was surprised and pleased, and all he could say was, “Just the thing; just the thing”; then looking at the nurse he added: “*That’s Mary*; that’s Mary; just the right thing at the right time.” Not Mary the efficient housekeeper or capable manager, but just the right woman in the right place.

It was on this board that Walt Whitman’s last words were inscribed.

His book, which had been completed, was out of the press, and a few copies had been hurried through that he might see the work as it would go out into the world. Mr. D. McKay, his publisher, brought them over one evening, and the dying poet expressed to him the great satisfaction he felt at the manner in which the edition had been produced. He asked to have fifty copies bound at once in Manila paper covers, that he might give or send them to certain friends. This was done; he designated the people who were to receive them, and Mr. Traubel attended to the inscriptions. The last thing Walt wrote for printing was a notice in regard to this edition. His writing board was of the greatest service to him in accomplishing this task; without it, not only this notice, but his last written words to his friends at large, his farewell Greeting or Salutation, would never have been written.

When he had completed the notice, making numerous alterations until he seemed satisfied, he called for Mrs. Davis, who on coming into the room held a secret "confab" with him, after which she got ready and left the house. The following afternoon she again left the house and on her return handed Walt a printed proof. In this, as of

old, he made some corrections, and it was again taken out and again called for. These were Mary's last visits to the "quaint little printing office," and the "old fellow acquaintance's" last acts of kindness to his dying patron.

In the two days intervening between the writing of this notice and its ultimate approval, Walt wrote his last words to all—the final Greeting just mentioned to his friends at large. He wrote it himself on post office paper, and when he had covered one piece, he called for mucilage with which to add a second. He had measured the little printed slip, and had left a space for it. He worked intently until the task was completed. His tendency to recline backward made it difficult for him to use the pen properly, therefore Mrs. Davis or the nurse usually sat behind him, and by leaning forward and holding him in her arms supported him in a more comfortable and convenient position. While one assisted him in this way, the other held the inkstand near him, as he could no longer reach it from its accustomed place, the chair beside his bed.

When the Greeting was finished, the printed notice was pasted in its place. The original writing was sent to Mr. Bolton of

England, with the request that he would have it facsimiled and distributed amongst all Walt's friends. Here is the letter Horace Traubel wrote conveying the poet's wishes.

CAMDEN, N. J., February 8th, 1892

"W. asked me this ev'g to give you this counsel.—'If entirely convenient, facsimile the letter of February 6th, and send it copiously to European and American friends and friends anywhere,'—letting us have copies here as well. It was a great struggle to get this letter written and he wishes it to go out as his general salutation of friends to whom his strength will not permit him specially to write. It was framed with that end in view."

The request was promptly complied with and an exact reproduction was made, even to the use of two pieces of paper pasted together, as in the original. The desired copies arrived before Walt's death, and he gave or sent them to his friends, as he had done with the author's copies of his book. He evinced much interest in doing this, and kindly presented his nurses with both a facsimile and a book.



As may be supposed, everyone was on the alert to secure his last signature, and the nurse, who had the advantage of being on the spot when he was able to write, had this honor. Selecting one of the numerous photographs with which his room abounded—she subsequently learned that this was his own favorite (*“Mr. Whitman was not vain as to pictures of himself. He seemed to like best the photograph showing him sitting in a chair with a butterfly in his hand.”—Thomas Donaldson*)—she kept it near his bed, and when the watched-for opportunity came, one morning after he had signed some papers and had written a kindly word to his sister (Mrs. Heyde of Burlington, Vt.), while she sat behind him as a support, she reached for it, telling him that she would like to own it, and hoped if he were not too fatigued he would autograph it for her. He willingly complied, saying: “Yes, for you; but I would do it for no one else.” (I gave this picture, with feelings of gratitude for kindness shown me, to Dr. Lucien Howe, of Buffalo, New York.—E. L. K.) The signature was written with a blue pencil, as he had now discarded ink. Only once again did he sign his name in full, and this was in a business document. He used simply his

initials in his last effort to write to his sister.

Unhappily, a change of care was in prospect, for Mrs. Keller was to leave him the second week in March, in consequence of an engagement previously made. She had mentioned this to Dr. Bucke, who had assured her that it could not possibly conflict with his friend's case. But when the sick man lingered until late in February, it was seen that some steps must be taken. And yet his span of life was so uncertain, that even at this late day it was deemed wiser not to mention the subject to him until it could no longer be postponed. The matter was talked over between his executors, his sister-in-law and the doctors, and all agreed that under the circumstances a stranger in the house would not be desirable. Mrs. Davis in particular dreaded it, and had made provision against it. The friend who had before kept house for her, while she made her trip to Southern California, was to come again to do the housework, so that her own undivided time and attention might be given to the dying man.

The nurse left on March 8. From this time on Mr. Whitman grew more and more uneasy in bed, and as he could now lie upon

his left side but a few moments at a time, he required almost constant turning; and for eighteen days and nights his two faithful attendants did this. A water bed was bought for him; he only had the comfort of it for a single night.

"March 25, 1.15 A. M., 1892.—We put him on the water bed at twelve o'clock. I have turned him twice since, and I can assure you from present indications if it does the old man no good, it will us. He turns just as easy again; can turn him with one hand, and then it does away with the ring. He was turned sixty-three times in the last twenty-four hours; how is that for business? Kind of beats when you were here. . . . Mama has one of her old headaches, has had it since yesterday, but hopes to be clear of it by morning. . . . We had a run of visitors to-day, and the old gent had four letters in the morning mail, of which three were applications for autographs." (*Extracts from Warren's letter to Mrs. Keller.*)

His last days were a repetition of the preceding ones; a flaring up of the torch, and a dying down; a fainter flare, and a gentle going out.

On the evening of March 26 a little card was printed and widely circulated.

*Camden, N. J., March 26, '92.*

*Whitman began 'sinking at 4.30 P. M. He continued to grow worse, and died at 6.43 P. M. The end came peacefully. He was conscious until the last.*

*There were present at the bedside when he died— Mrs. Davis, Warren Fitzinger, Thos. B. Hained, Horace L. Teauble and myself.*

*Alex. McAlister, M. D.*

This young physician saw much of Mr. Whitman during the last three months of his life, and his faithful services were given without price.

The evening previous to his death Mr. Whitman requested to see Mr. Donaldson, the trusted friend who had done so much to make his home life a success. He came at once, and they had a long last interview. Mrs. Davis promised to notify him if the patient grew worse, and the next day at three P. M. she wrote for him to come, saying that Mr. Whitman was surely "slipping away" from them. He died before his friend reached the house. His last words were addressed to his faithful "sailor boy": "Shift, Warry." It was the time for the final turn, from life into death. Mrs. Davis closed his eyes.

## XVIII

### WINDING UP

*" . . . the grand old man whose kindly face we never shall forget."*—DR. ALEX. MCALISTER (*In a letter to Mrs. Keller*).

*"These promises are fair, the parties sure."*  
—SHAKESPEARE (*I King Henry IV*).

ON the morrow the little parlors were again cleared—this time to make room for a coffin—and Walt Whitman, at last free from pain, was brought downstairs. An artist was in waiting to take a cast of his face, and later a post-mortem was held. Mrs. Davis thought the latter something dreadful, believing as she did that it was either prompted by curiosity or was done simply for the sake of a newspaper article. When all preliminaries were over, the poet, clothed in his accustomed style, was laid in his coffin. This, of heavy oak, was placed in the centre of one room, and all through the afternoon friends and acquaintances came to see him. The following day the public was admitted, and thousands thronged

in to look at the familiar form and face: that placid face, telling that the long sought-for rest was at last attained. People entered through one parlor door, then passing around the coffin left by the other.

During the morning Mrs. Davis made a hurried run to Philadelphia to procure some needful things for the funeral, and on her return was surprised and horrified to find that during her absence a load of empty barrels had arrived, and that into these the literary executors—Dr. Bucke having arrived the night before—were hastily packing all the movable contents of the two upper rooms. This, to her, heartless expediency was more than she could bear, and going upstairs she asked why Mr. Whitman's things might not remain undisturbed until after he was buried. Dr. Bucke told her curtly that his own time was limited, and it was not convenient for *him*. Overcome with grief, she sought her own room. She knew that Mr. Whitman's literary effects belonged legally to his executors, but she felt that his home was sacred to him while he remained in it. The barrels containing his writings and some articles coming under the head of personal property, such as books, pictures, his knapsack, the inkstand Mrs.



Davis had bought for him while on her journey, and by him returned to her, etc., were taken from the house while he, the owner, lay there sleeping in his coffin.

Of Walt Whitman's funeral much has been said and written. It was arranged and conducted by friends, and was attended by many celebrated people. Warren was sick and worn out, but kept up bravely and was at everybody's bid and "on deck" throughout all; then he was obliged to yield to a heavy cold and utter exhaustion. Mrs. Davis was little better off, but was able to be around.

It has been said that in Mr. Whitman's will he provided generously for his housekeeper. He left her one thousand dollars; not one-fourth of the sum she had expended for him, without taking into consideration her seven years of unpaid service—and such service! The only additional bequest to her was the free rentage of the house for the term of one year.

In a few months Mrs. Louise Whitman followed her brother-in-law, and the will went into other hands. Still a few months later Edward Whitman died in the asylum and was buried from the undertaker's, with no services whatever. But three people fol-

lowed him to the grave: his brother George, Mrs. Davis, and Warren Fritzinger.

When the professional nurse left Camden, Mrs. Whitman, to simplify matters, settled with her from her own private bank account. This she did in anticipation of the winding-up of the estate at the expiration of one year after the death of her brother-in-law. She had talked with Mrs. Davis on this subject and had instructed her to put in her claim at the proper time. The year expired, but Mrs. Davis on presenting the claim was told that it was thought that in all ways full justice had been done her, and that no demands whatever of hers would be recognized; furthermore, that it was the wish of the executors that she should vacate the premises *at once*.

This was an unexpected blow, and although her regard for Dr. Bucke personally was lessened, her confidence in his integrity remained unshaken, and she immediately wrote to him. Unmindful of his promises that all should be well for her, and that he would be personally responsible, he coolly refused to take any part in the matter, saying that it was something which did not in the least concern him; she must settle it with those at hand. She saw no way of re-

dress, and was given barely time in which to find another house. What an exit!

Watch, the dog, showed more resistance, and was determined to remain in his old quarters. He absolutely refused to leave, and as a last resort was carried away in a securely locked cab.

Warren was no better dealt with than his mother. Sadly changed from the once robust sailor boy, he tramped the streets of Camden and Philadelphia in search of work. *Any* work this time; any work but nursing! He applied to those who had been Mr. Whitman's most active friends when anything of note was going on, but no encouragement was given him; some went so far as to tell him that his services to his late patient had about incapacitated him for many kinds of employment. He solicited and applied, but no helping hand was held out to him. He took soap orders, then accepted the only thing that presented itself, the position of night watchman in a Camden bank. After awhile a tea merchant—one of the most kind-hearted of men and a friend of both his mother and Mr. Whitman—offered him a clerkship in his store. He would have preferred outside work, but had no choice and gladly accepted. In a year he

married, and notwithstanding disappointments and discouragements, was the same bright cheerful Warry to the end of his short life. He died after a few days' sickness in October, 1899, aged thirty-three years.

## XIX

### THE TRIAL

*"'Tis called ungrateful  
With dull unwillingness to repay a debt."*  
—SHAKESPEARE (*Richard III*).

*"Proceed in justice, which shall have due course."*  
—(*The Winter's Tale*).

**B**UT to go back. Mrs. Davis's friends, many of Mr. Whitman's, and a number of outsiders were disgusted and indignant at the treatment she had received and united in urging her to sue the estate and take her case into court. She was loath to do this, and hesitated for a long while; but in 1894 the unsolicited offer of an eminent judge to represent her without a fee (he said she was the worst used woman he had ever met) and the continued persuasions of her friends roused her at last to stand up for herself, and for once to take her own part. The loss of her money did not trouble her so much as the thought of what might be (and had been) said against her. She was confident that had Mrs. Whitman lived all

would have been different. But Mrs. Whitman had not lived, and she had to face a problem that perplexed and saddened her, darkening her view of human nature, and throwing a shadow over the past and the future. The whole thing seemed so impossible, so hopelessly unfair.

The trial came off in the county court house, Camden, in April, 1894. Mrs. Davis's witnesses came voluntarily to her aid—the tea merchant only, and at his own request, being subpœnaed. There was the former orphan girl, now a wife and mother, who told the story of the poet's coming to the widow's door; of her many kind offices to him, and his appreciation; of his repeated promises to repay her if she would come to live with him, and his urgent appeals to her to do so. She gave the particulars of the transfer into the Mickle Street house, and much that followed after; the purchases Mrs. Davis had made, and the expense she had been put to. The first professional nurse, Mr. Musgrove, came forward that he might speak his good word for the late housekeeper, and the second and last trained nurse (Mrs. Keller) was glad to testify in public to the plaintiff's devotion to her distinguished patient, and his great regard



for her. Warren told the plain and convincing story of Mr. Whitman's intentions, as expressed to himself, of repaying his mother for the money she had spent. When asked how he knew that she had spent her own money, he answered that he had recognized at least the new gold pieces he had given her—the double eagles—which had gone one by one during the last two years. Then when the defendant's lawyer asked, in a very insinuating manner, what had become of the champagne left in the cellar at the time of Mr. Whitman's death, the young artist who lived next door told how some boys had made their way into the cellar one day, had drunk the wine and become hopelessly intoxicated.

The friend who had kept house on the two special occasions, and who had been a constant visitor there for seven years; neighbors who had seen Mrs. Davis helping the old man in and out of his carriage and rolling chair, and carefully covering and protecting him while he was sitting out of doors; and others who knew of her unremitting attentions, all spoke for her, while quite a number of citizens told her that her case was so strong they would not volunteer as

witnesses, but were with her heart and soul. Among these was the young doctor.

On the opposite side were the two literary executors, George Whitman, and a few others. The oyster man was there to tell of the quantity of oysters he had taken or sent to the house—more than one man, a sick man at that, could possibly consume; the object was to accuse Mrs. Davis by suggestion of getting them for herself in a dishonorable manner; but when on the stand the man could not speak, and after the trial went to her and begged her pardon.

Much interest was manifested in the case, which lasted two days; the court room was crowded at each session, and it was not difficult to tell on which side lay the sympathy. Her opponents could bring no charge against her; they could only try to slur her and belittle what she had done.

The testimony taken, Mrs. Davis's counsel called his client forward, placed a chair for her in the sight of all, and then in touching, eloquent words summed up the case, saying that many among those present had seen Walt Whitman going about the streets of Camden, alone, cold and neglected, that it was a well-remembered sight, just as it was a well-known fact that this good

woman's heart and home alone had been opened to him.

As was expected, Mrs. Davis won her case; she received a fair sum of money, and the congratulations, spoken or written, of all who knew her sterling worth and the true story of her years of service.

## XX

### CONCLUSION

*"Which makes her story true, even to the point of her death."*—SHAKESPEARE (*All's Well That Ends Well*).

*"A virtuous and a Christian-like conclusion."*  
—(Richard III).

IF, profiting from past experience, Mrs. Davis had learned to realize that into all lives there comes a time when self has the right of consideration, she could have avoided further complications. But the early precepts were too deeply implanted, and before she had left the Mickle Street house a selfish uninteresting woman had in some insidious way fastened upon her. This burden she carried to the end.

Nor were money troubles wanting, grave and crippling, and due of course to the same fatal habit of helping others at her own expense. One day there came to her in great agitation an admirer of her late friend and patient, saying that he was threatened with

financial ruin, even defamation of character, unless a certain sum of money was at once forthcoming; simply a loan for a few months; it would be faithfully repaid. Mrs. Davis had long contemplated purchasing a small home; she had the means of doing so, and this money was at once offered and accepted, but never returned. Warren's death followed, and her one strong prop was gone.

Mrs. Davis was not much of a correspondent; but notwithstanding this, she and the nurse, Mrs. Keller, occasionally exchanged letters, and the most friendly relations existed between them. After there had been a longer silence than usual, Mrs. Keller wrote to Dr. McAlister, asking him if their friend still lived in Berkley Street (the house she went to from Mickle Street, and the only one she lived in after that), and if so, requesting him to call and learn why she did not write. He did so, and replied that he had found Mrs. Davis about as usual, that she had sent much love and the promise of writing soon. Another long interval of silence followed, and finally came this letter—the last communication that passed between them.

"434 Berkley Street, CAMDEN, N. J.

October 16, 1908.

"DEAR MRS. KELLER,

I am just in receipt of your letter. Yes, Dr. McAlister did call last spring and I told him I would write you in a few days, which I fully intended to do, but it so turned out that I went to France with a friend, where I spent the summer; I have been home about three weeks. My going away was entirely unexpected, and I had but a few hours to get in readiness; left everything at loose ends, and one vexatious oversight was I forgot my address book. I thought about you many times, and would have written to you from over there had I had your address. I was delighted to hear from you—will write to you in a few days. I am wrestling with a bad cold. Hope you are well.

"Lovingly,

"M. O. DAVIS."

Mrs. Davis had always wished to see Niagara Falls, and Mrs. Keller, whose home was near that city, hoped that the long looked-for and talked-of visit was at last near at hand; would take place in the fol-



lowing summer. Instead, at the expiration of a month she received a black-edged envelope, the contents reading:

"Yourself and family are respectfully invited to attend the funeral of Mary O. Davis on Monday, November 23, at 3 P. M., from the son's residence—H. M. Fritzinger, 810 State Street, Camden, N. J. Interment at Evergreen Cemetery."

On November 20, 1908, the following notice appeared in several papers.

**WHITMAN'S LAST NURSE DEAD:  
Woman Who Cared for Poet Succumbs Too.**

Mrs. Mary L. Davis, who nursed Walt Whitman, the "Good Gray Poet," during his last illness, and was with him at his death, at No. 328 Mickel street, Camden, died last night in Cooper Hospital of intestinal troubles. She was the widow of Levin J. Davis.

After the death of Whitman Mrs. Davis resided for a short time at No. 432 Clinton street, Camden, and then she went to live with a wealthy family in New York city. About a year ago she developed intestinal troubles. The family she was living with took her to Paris for treatment by eminent specialists. She returned a month ago and went to Camden to visit Henry M. Fritzinger, of No. 810 State street. There Mrs. Davis was taken ill with the affliction from which she suffered so much, and was removed to Cooper Hospital.

The nurse who had cared for him in his last illness!—not his "faithful housekeeper,

nurse and friend." But the brief report, it will be seen, had more than one error.

Perhaps the best way of giving a clear picture of the concluding stages will be to quote a letter from her son—as he was always called; Warren's brother Harry. It is a very human document.

†

"DEAR FRIEND,

I am convinced that you think this letter should have been written long before, but on account of how things have gone I can assure you that I was taxed to the utmost. Mother died on the 18th of November; buried on the 23rd. You would be surprised how people who were her friends through money have changed. . . .

"When Mother moved from Mickle Street to 434 Berkley Street she lived there until she died, although I tried for years to get her to come and live with me, as she would have been company for my wife when I was away. She had a party living with her by the name of Mrs. H——, a big lazy impostor. She waited on her, carried coal and water upstairs, ashes and slops downstairs, until she worked herself into the condition which she died from.

"About eighteen months or two years

ago, there was a family by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Mailloux, and Dr. Bell of New York, admirers of Walt Whitman, who came on and got acquainted with Mother. They took a great liking to her and offered her a home with them, but she still stayed on in Berkley Street. Mother paid them several visits, and at last was persuaded to accompany Mrs. Mailloux to Paris on their regular trip, as a companion. She left America feeling as well as ever. My wife and I saw her aboard the train at Broad Street, and she was met in Jersey City by her friends.

“While she was in Paris, this woman who was living with her started the devil going, when I was compelled to go down and take charge of the house. It warmed up until I was compelled to write to Mother and ask her to send me authority to protect her interests. This spoiled her visit; she returned to America before the rest of the party. When she arrived she came directly to my house; was suffering with a severe cold. She was with us about six weeks. In the meantime my wife had her fixed up in fairly good shape. She told me that she was going to break up and come to live with us, but could not do it in a day or two.

“After she was home about a week she

was sick. She fooled along until I became dissatisfied and sent my doctor down to her. He attended her two days, and ordered her to the hospital, as an operation was the only thing to save her. After she was opened they found the bowels separated, also a cancerous tumor. She lived five days after the operation.

"All this trouble was not felt until two weeks before she died. Where the report came from about her ill health and going to Paris for aid I do not know, but you always find newspaper reports wrong.

"Well, there is one thing that I feel thankful for: that she died before I did. If such had not been the case, she would have been buried in a pauper's grave, or gone to the dissecting table.

"Mother has been a friend to many; they have handled what money she had, amounting to hundreds of dollars. When she died all debts were cancelled as far as they were concerned, and not one would say: 'Here is five cents towards putting a good and faithful servant away.' But Mother was laid away as fine as anybody. . . ."

Little more need be said. Mrs. Davis was comparatively a young woman at the

time of Walt Whitman's death,—being then in her fifty-fifth year,—and in the sixteen years that followed, his friends passed away one by one, and she almost passed out of the memory of his life, as though she had never taken part in it. But the part she did take deserves remembrance.

Harry Fritzinger's letter speaks for itself, and I have tried, poorly as I may have done so, to speak for one whom I valued and value as a good woman and a loving friend.

*Elizabeth Levent Keller*

# WALT WHITMAN'S MONUMENTS

A LETTER WRITTEN IN CAMDEN ON THE  
TWENTY-SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY  
OF HIS DEATH

BY GUIDO BRUNO

DEAR WALT WHITMAN:

To-day is the 27th anniversary of your death. I came here to worship at your shrine. I am a European, you must know, and reverence of our great writers and artists is bred in us, is part of our early training. We love to visit the houses where genius lived, to see with our own eyes the places our great men loved. Camden hasn't changed much since you left. The people among whom you lived are to-day the same as they were then: petty, mean, vain, unforgiving. Your friends are few just as in the olden days. Let me tell you about it.

It never entered my mind to make sure of the street number of your old residence. "Any child on the street will direct me," I thought, "to Whitman's house." Getting off the ferry, the same ferry on which you



loved to ride back and forth, in spring and autumn, I asked a policeman how to get to your house. "The Whitman House?" he repeated; "it's somewhere out of the way, I'm sure. You had better stop in the Ridgely House. That's the best place in town." He knew nothing of you and thought I was looking for a hotel. A druggist at the near-by corner knew about you. "William Kettler used to be a great friend of his," he told me. "He'll tell you all about him." And he gave me Mr. Kettler's address. Mr. Kettler still lives on North Street, and has become chief city librarian lately. He's very deaf, but extremely kind and friendly. He was in the midst of moving. Mrs. Kettler is ill, you must know, and they will live on the shore for the rest of the season.

"This Whitman cult makes me sick," he commenced. "Who was Whitman anyway? A poet? I dare say that there are hundreds of magazine writers to-day as there were during his lifetime, who write just as good verse as he did. And his prose is abominable. His writings are not fit to be read in a respectable home. They corrupt the mind and are dangerous to the morals. We knew him well, we saw him daily and his disgraceful way of living was open town talk.

"I was a newspaper man and associated with the old Camden *Post* at the time of Bonsall, when Whitman used to come to see us almost daily. Bonsall used to be a friend of his and did him a great many good turns. But Whitman was an ingrate.

"Shall I tell you what we respectable citizens of Camden think of him? I don't mean the young generation, but the people who actually knew him. It doesn't sound nice to speak badly about dead people. But we knew him as an incorrigible beggar who lived very immorally . . . an old loafer.

"Why, only a few months ago, one of the most prominent citizens of our town, John J. Russ, the great real estate dealer, objected to Whitman's name on the Honor Tablet of our new library. Judge Howard Carrot of Merchantville could tell you how that old scoundrel got people into trouble, and if the case had come into court, the scandal would have been so great, that the Judge decided to dispose of it privately.

"I remember, several years after the Civil War, Whitman's last visit to the Camden *Post*. Mr. Bonsall, the chief editor, myself and Whitman were chatting in the office. There was a very young reporter in the room. Mr. Whitman insisted on telling us

one of his filthy stories. He knew many of them and would tell them without discriminating who was present. Filth seemed to be always on his mind. Mr. Bonsall was shocked. And I remember distinctly what he told him, before turning him out of the office. 'Look here, Whitman,' he said, 'why don't you become a useful citizen, like every one of us? You never did anything decent and worthy of an American citizen. While we took up our guns and went out to fight the enemy, you stalked about hospitals, posing as a philanthropist. Later on, we returned to civilian life, hunting jobs and pensions, trying to earn a livelihood, while you were preaching Humanitarian principles and talking against the cruelties of warfare on Union Square. *Now*, while we are chained to our jobs, you are writing pornographic pieces that no self-respecting publisher would print, and loaf about most of the time, corrupting our young folk. I will not tolerate loose talk in these offices, therefore, get out and never let me see you again.' "

"But haven't you said," I interjected, "that Mr. Bonsall was a friend of Whitman?"

"They used to be friends," cried Mr. Kettler, "until that treacherous business of

the poem came up. Whitman was getting up a little book of poems. Mr. Bonsall, who, in my estimation, was not only an excellent man and writer, but also a poet of no mean ability, sent in a contribution. This particular poem was very beautiful. It was the only one that Whitman did not print. Ever since Mr. Bonsall and myself had not much use for Whitman, who stabbed his friends in the back at the first opportunity."

"Hurt vanity," I thought. How small this man Kettler seemed to me with his petty grievances. Forty years have passed and he couldn't forget your refusal of a poem.

"But what is the worst," Mr. Kettler continued, "Whitman has spoiled the life of Horace Traubel. What an excellent young man he used to be, the son of an honored, upright citizen. Traubel got obsessed with Whitman's greatness. He devoted his whole life to Whitman. He took Whitman's morals for his own standard." And Mr. Kettler proceeded to tell about Traubel's private life. Some stories a policeman's wife, Traubel's next door neighbor, had told him.

Does all this amuse you, Walt Whitman?  
The frame-house where you lived is in a

dreadful condition. An Italian family is living there. A taxi driver, Thomas Skymer. He has three children and four boarders. The boarders have children, too. A litter of young ones are playing in your back yard, around the broken well. Your front room, where you used to sit near the window and entertain your visitors, is a living and dining room combined. Not even a picture of yours is in this room. Over the mantel hangs a cheap chromo of the Italian King. One of the little boys knew your name. "Do you want to see where the old guy died?" he asked, and led me into the back room on the same floor. There was a big bed there. I never saw a bigger one in my life. "We all sleep in it," said the boy.

I know, Walt Whitman, you are shrugging your shoulders, smiling indifferently. What does it matter to you who is sleeping now in the room where you died, who is living now in the house where you lived, loved and sang? But my heart cramped and ached. The poverty, the bad odor, the utter irreverence! This Italian pays \$10 a month rent. The neighborhood is run down, and the property could be easily bought for a few thousand dollars. Is this how the greatest nation honors its greatest literary genius?

Your enthusiastic young physician, Dr. Alexander McAlister, has grown a bit old, but not in spirit. He took me up to his library and here, as well as in his heart, you have found your sanctuary.

"I loved Walt Whitman," Dr. McAlister said, "ever since I was a student in the medical school, and met the old gentleman regularly on the street. We talked occasionally; once he asked me to his house, later on, after my graduation, I had occasion to render him professional services, and for all the years, until Whitman's death, I called on him at least once a day. He was the most clean-minded and kind man I have ever met. I never heard him utter an obscene word. The magnificent personality of Walt Whitman and his general comradeship, inspired by his ingrained feelings and intuitive beliefs concerning the destiny of America, must certainly have impressed all who met him long before he was known as a poet. He lived a life so broad and noble that it will be more studied and emulated, and will sink deeper and deeper into the heart. The social, human world, through his aid, will reach a level hitherto unattained. The new life which he preached has not been even dreamed of yet, has not become yet an object



of aspiration to us Americans. He has set the spark to the prepared fuel, the living glow has crept deeply into the dormant mass; even now tongues of flame begin to shoot forth. The longer Whitman is dead the better he will be known. He seems to me the typical American, the typical modern, the source and centre of a new, spiritual aspiration, saner and manlier than any heretofore. Whitman thought that man has within him the element of the Divine, and that this element was capable of indefinite growth and expansion.

"He was the most democratic man that ever lived. Everybody was welcome to his house, everybody his equal, he was everybody's friend. He had many enemies, but also many friends. He thought Ingersoll his best friend. Dr. Longaker and Horace Traubel were almost always present, especially during the last years of his life. Once in a while they got on his nerves because they continually carried paper and pencil, writing down every word he said. Let me tell you a few incidents of his last illness. They all expected him to die. Traubel and Dr. Longaker were constantly in the hall outside of the sick room, eager to catch every one of

Whitman's words. Warren Fritzinger, his nurse, was with him.

" 'Are those damn fools out there this afternoon?' he remarked when his condition became very weak and the rustling of papers in the hall seemed to annoy him.

"The day before he died I came in the morning and asked him, 'How do you feel?'

" 'Well, Doctor,' he answered, 'I am tired of this dreadful monotony of waiting. I am tired of the sword of Damocles suspended over my head.' "

Would it interest you, Walt Whitman, to know about your last minutes on earth, when you lay unconscious in a coma? Dr. McAlister described them to me. "His end was peaceful. He died at 6:43 P. M. At 4:30 he called Mrs. Davis and requested to be shifted from the position he was lying in. The nurse was sent for, and later on they sent me a message. When I reached his bedside, he was lying on his right side, his pulse was very weak and his respiration correspondingly so. I asked him if he suffered pain and if I could do anything for him. He smiled kindly and murmured low. He lay quietly for some time with closed eyes. A little after 5 his eyes opened for a moment, his lips moved slightly, and he succeeded in

whispering: '*Warry, Shift.*' Warry was his nurse, and these were the last words of Whitman. Then the end came. I bent over him to detect the last sign of the fleeting life. His heart continued to pulsate for fully fifty minutes after he ceased breathing."

Dr. McAlister was a great friend of yours, Walt Whitman, and I feel that you are with him every minute of his life. He showed me letters from your old nurse, Mrs. Keller, who wrote a few articles about you. He treasures the books you inscribed for him, your pictures hang on his walls and he especially loves the little plaster cast you gave him.

Of course, you know that an autopsy was performed shortly after your death. May I tell you about your brain, which is at present in the possession of the Anthropometric Society? I believe it is an honor to have one's brains placed in this society's museum, because this society has been organized for the express purpose of studying high-type brains. The cause of your death was pleurisy of your left side and consumption of the right lung. You had a fatty liver, and a large gall stone in the gall bladder. The good doctors marvelled that you could have carried on respiration for so long a time with the

limited amount of useful lung tissue. They ascribed it largely to that indomitable energy "which was so characteristic of everything pertaining to the life of Walt Whitman." They said in their official report that any other man would have died much earlier with one-half of the pathological changes which existed in your body.

In the late afternoon while the sun was setting over an ideal spring day, I walked out to the Harleigh Cemetery, where you built for yourself that magnificent tomb. How wise you were, Walt Whitman, to supervise the cutting of the stones, to watch the workmen while they were preparing your grave. What a beautiful spot you chose for your last resting place. The lake lay still in the warm evening air, the willows swayed gently as if patted by unseen hands. An old working-man, about to leave the cemetery, showed me the spot where you used to sit and watch them work. He told me how you wrote "pieces" on scraps of paper that you borrowed here and there, and how you read them to the stonecutters, who were building your tomb. I asked for the key. They keep it locked lately. I opened the heavy granite door, and stood for quite a while in the semi-darkness of your little house. I

thought of you lying there on your bier, peaceful, indifferent, kind. Then I thought of the other monument you had built in words, a temple not made with hands, builded for eternity.

Always self-sufficing, walking your own path towards your own goal. No legend tells of you, of your life or achievement. You live in the hearts of thousands of Americans. Soon, very soon, perhaps, your name and America will be synonymous. Walt Whitman, we here on earth are awakening to your ideals of America.

Affectionately yours,

GUIDO BRUNO

# WALT WHITMAN SPEAKS





EVER upon this stage  
Is acted God's calm annual drama,  
Gorgeous processions, songs of birds,  
Sunrise that fullest feeds and freshens most  
the soul,  
The heaving sea, the waves upon the shore,  
the musical, strong waves,  
The woods, the stalwart trees, the slender,  
tapering trees,  
The liliput countless armies of the grass,  
The heat, the showers, the measureless pas-  
turages,  
The scenery of the snows, the winds' free  
orchestra,  
The stretching light-hung roof of clouds, the  
clear cerulean and the silvery fringes,  
The high dilating stars, the placid beckon-  
ing stars,  
The moving flocks and herds, the plains and  
emerald meadows,  
The shows of all the varied lands and all the  
growths and products.

[*The Return of the Heroes*]

SHOT gold, maroon and violet, dazzling silver,  
emerald, fawn,  
The earth's whole amplitude and Nature's  
multiform power consign'd for once to  
colors;  
The light, the general air possess'd by them  
—colors till now unknown,  
No limit, confine — not the Western sky  
alone — the high meridian — North,  
South, all,  
Pure luminous color fighting the silent shadows  
to the last.

[*A Prairie Sunset*]

EVER the undiscouraged, resolute, struggling  
soul of man;  
(Have former armies fail'd? then we send  
fresh armies — and fresh again);  
Ever the grappled mysteries of all earth's  
ages old or new;  
Ever the eager eyes, hurrahs, the welcome-  
clapping hands, the loud applause;  
Ever the soul dissatisfied, curious, uncon-  
vinced at last,  
Struggling to-day the same — battling the  
same.

[*Life*]

SPIRIT that form'd this scene,  
These tumbled rock-piles grim and red,  
These reckless heaven-ambitious peaks,  
These gorges, turbulent-clear streams, this  
    naked freshness,  
These formless wild arrays, for reasons of  
    their own,  
I know thee, savage spirit — we have com-  
    muned together,  
Mine too such wild arrays, for reasons of  
    their own;  
Was't charged against my chants they had  
    forgotten art?  
To fuse within themselves its rules precise  
    and delicatessen?  
The lyrist's measur'd beat, the wrought-out  
    temple's grace — column and polish'd  
    arch forgot?  
But thou that revellest here — spirit that  
    form'd this scene,  
They have remember'd thee.

*[Spirit That Formed This Scene]*

QUICKSAND years that whirl me I know not  
whither,  
Your schemes, politics, fail, lines give way,  
substances mock and elude me,  
Only the theme I sing, the great and strong-  
possess'd soul, eludes not,  
One's-Self must never give way — that is  
the final substance — that out of all is  
sure,  
Out of politics, triumphs, battles, life, what  
at last finally remains?  
When shows break up what but One's-Self  
is sure?

[*Quicksand Years*]



O LIVING always, always dying!  
O the burials of me past and present,  
O me while I stride ahead, material, visible,  
    imperious as ever;  
O me, what I was for years, now dead, (I  
    lament not, I am content);  
O to disengage myself from those corpses of  
    me, which I turn and look at where I  
    cast them,  
To pass on (O living! always living!) and  
    leave the corpses behind.  
    [*O Living Always, Always Dying*]

THIS is thy hour, O Soul, thy free flight into  
the wordless,  
Away from books, away from art, the day  
erased, the lesson done,  
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing,  
pondering the themes thou lovest best,  
Night, sleep, death and the stars.

[*A Clear Midnight*]

I WAS thinking the day most splendid till I  
saw what the not-day exhibited,  
I was thinking this globe enough till there  
sprang out so noiseless around me  
myriads of other globes.

Now while the great thoughts of space and  
eternity fill me I will measure myself by  
them,

And now touch'd with the lives of other  
globes arrived as far along as those of  
the earth,

Or waiting to arrive, or pass'd on farther  
than those of the earth,

I henceforth no more ignore them than I  
ignore my own life,

Or the lives of the earth arrived as far as  
mine, or waiting to arrive.

O I see now that life cannot exhibit all to  
me, as the day cannot,

I see that I am to wait for what will be ex-  
hibited by death.

[*Night on the Prairies*]

Now the great organ sounds,  
Tremulous, while underneath (as the hid  
    footholds of the earth,  
On which arising rest, and leaping forth  
    depend,  
All shapes of beauty, grace and strength, all  
    hues we know,  
Green blades of grass and warbling birds,  
    children that gambol and play, the  
    clouds of heaven above)  
The strong base stands, and its pulsations  
    intermits not,  
Bathing, supporting, merging all the rest,  
    maternity of all the rest,  
And with it every instrument in multitudes,  
The players playing, all the world's mu-  
    sicians,  
The solemn hymns and masses rousing  
    adoration,  
All passionate heart-chants, sorrowful ap-  
    peals,  
The measureless sweet vocalists of ages,  
And for their solvent setting earth's own  
    diapason,  
Of winds and woods and mighty ocean  
    waves,

A new composite orchestra, binder of years  
and climes, ten-fold renewer,  
As of the far-back days the poets tell, the  
Paradiso,  
The straying thence, the separation long, but  
now the wandering done,  
The journey done, the journeyman come  
home,  
And man and art with Nature fused again.  
[*Proud Music of the Storm*]

Now trumpeter for thy close,  
Vouchsafe a higher strain than any yet,  
Sing to my soul, renew its languishing faith  
and hope,  
Rouse up my slow belief, give me some  
vision of the future,  
Give me for once its prophecy and joy.

O glad, exulting, culminating song!  
A vigor more than earth's is in thy notes,  
Marches of victory — man disenthral'd —  
the conqueror at last,  
Hymns to the universal God from universal  
man — all joy!  
A reborn race appears — a perfect world,  
all joy!  
Women and men in wisdom, innocence and  
health — all joy!  
Riotous laughing bacchanals fill'd with joy!  
War, sorrow, suffering gone — the rank  
earth purged — nothing but joy left!  
The ocean fill'd with joy — the atmosphere  
all joy!  
Joy! joy! in freedom, worship, love! joy in  
the ecstasy of life!  
Enough to merely be! enough to breathe!  
Joy! joy! all over joy!

[*The Mystic Trumpeter*]



THE touch of flame — the illuminating fire  
— the loftiest look at last,  
O'er city, passion, sea — o'er prairie, mountain,  
wood — the earth itself;  
The airy, different, changing hues of all, in  
falling twilight,  
Objects and groups, bearings, faces, reminiscences;  
The calmer sight — the golden setting, clear  
and broad:  
So much i' the atmosphere, the points of  
view, the situation whence we scan,  
Brought out by them alone — so much (perhaps  
the best) unreck'd before;  
The lights indeed from them — old age's  
lambent peaks.

[*Old Age's Lambent Peaks*]

THANKS in old age — thanks ere I go,  
For health, the midday sun, the impalpable  
air — for life, mere life,  
For precious ever-lingering memories, (of  
you, my mother dear — you, father —  
you, brothers, sisters, friends),  
For all my days — not those of peace alone  
— the days of war the same,  
For gentle words, caresses, gifts from for-  
eign lands,  
For shelter, wine and meat — for sweet ap-  
preciation,  
(You distant, dim unknown — or young or  
old — countless, unspecified, readers  
belov'd,  
We never met, and ne'er shall meet — and  
yet our souls embrace, long, close and  
long);  
For beings, groups, love, deeds, words,  
books — for colors, forms,  
For all the brave strong men — devoted,  
hardy men — who've forward sprung  
in freedom's help, all years, all lands,  
For braver, stronger, more devoted men —  
(a special laurel ere I go, to life's war's  
chosen ones,

The cannoneers of song and thought — the  
great artillerists — the foremost lead-  
ers, captains of the soul) :

As soldier from an ended war return'd — as  
traveller out of myriads, to the long  
procession retrospective,

Thanks — joyful thanks! — a soldier's,  
traveller's thanks.

[*Thanks in Old Age*]

*Prais'd be the fathomless universe,  
For life and joy, and for objects and knowl-  
edge curious,  
And for love, sweet love — but praise!  
praise! praise!  
For the sure-entwinding arms of cool-enfold-  
ing death.*

*[When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard  
Bloom'd]*



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